

THE CRITICAL RECEPTION IN THE UNITED STATES
OF THE NEW POETRY OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY.


by

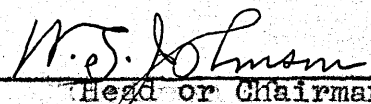
JOHN A. CLARK

A. B., Missouri Wesleyan College, 1925.

Submitted to the Department of
English and the Faculty of the
Graduate School of the University
of Kansas in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
or Master of Arts.

Approved by:


Instructor in charge.


Head or Chairman of Dept.

Sept. 11, 1928.

CONTENTS

PREFATORY NOTE.....	IV
Chapter I	AMERICAN POETRY AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY..... 1
Chapter II	AMERICAN POETRY DURING THE EARLY YEARS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY (1900-08).....10
	1. State of Poetry.....10
	2. Causes.....13
	3. Suggested panaceas.....17
Chapter III	STIRRINGS (1909-12).....22
	1. Impasses.....22
	2. Ripples.....26
	3. Conservative notes.....30
Chapter IV	THE STORM BREAKS (1913-14).....35
	1. Poetry and others.....35
	2. Signs of the times.....41
	3. Poetry criticism rubs.....47
	lifts eyes.....47
	4. Specimens.....54
Chapter V	THE STORM HIND DRANG PERIOD (1915-18).....61
	1. The critical attitude toward poetry as an art.....61
	2. Imagism.....74
	3. How the new voices were received.....82
	4. American poetry and the World War.....96
Chapter VI	DEFLATION (1919-24).....101
Chapter VII	DOLDRUMS (1925-28).....111
	1. Status of poetry today.....111
	2. Wanted: indigenous poetry.....120
	3. Reaction against intelligentsia verse.....126

APPENDIX	BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	134
	1. By chapters.....	134
	2. Short survey.....	146

PREFATORY NOTE

In this study I have attempted to set down the more or less representative critical attitude toward the "new poetry," from its rather indeterminate inception to the present time. I chose this subject because of my genuine interest in American literature, the "new poetry," and literary criticism generally. For material I have gone almost exclusively to magazines and reviews.

I wish to thank most warmly for their many kindnesses and helpful criticism: Dr. John H. Nelson, under whose direction this work was begun, Dr. Josephine M. Burnham, and Dr. Selden L. Whitcomb.

CHAPTER ONE

AMERICAN POETRY AT THE TURN
OF
THE CENTURY

The history of American literature from the close of the Civil War to the second decade of the twentieth century is mainly a history of American prose. During that period the New England tradition in American life and letters was slowly and quietly passing away. The course of literary empire was moving westward. Heretofore, Boston, and in a much less important sense, New York, had served the rest of the country--excepting the South for the most part--in an advisory capacity; now, following the close of the war, this tutorial situation was being reversed under the new leadership of such fresh and rugged Westerners as Harte, Hay, Twain, Eggleston, Howells, and Garland. And although the East continued for a long time to attract these writers from beyond the Appalachians to its environs, it signally failed to re-create them in its own image. They remained Western at the core, anyway. The writings of distinguished natives like Miss Jewett and Miss Wilkins are highly significant; we had not yet knelt to kiss the black rock, Realism, but a slight bending of the knees could be detected, even then.

If we would understand the causes which motivated, and the phenomena which conditioned and nourished, this particular mode of approach toward life as it is reflected in the fiction, and occasionally the essays, of this interregnum period of American literature, it is necessary to go to such books as The Education of Henry Adams, The Rise of American Civilization, The Mauve Decade, and Our Times. Auguries like The Hoosier Schoolmaster, the early novels of William Dean Howells, Main-Travelled Roads and Crumbling Idols, The Story of a Country Town, Daisy Miller, Maggie, a Girl of the Streets, McTeague, and Sister Carrie are symptomatic of the changes, political, social, economic, and cultural, which were radically and irrevocably transforming American life into something vastly different, if not altogether something vastly better. The Second American Revolution (Beard's characterization of the Civil War) gave birth to a new America: "Once the planting and the commercial states, as the Fathers with faithful accuracy described them, had been evenly balanced; by 1860 the balance was gone."¹ Reconstruction days for the South were "big business" days for the North and East. America had ceased to gaze upon the western sun of "The Golden Day," and was walking, timorously

¹The Rise of American Civilization, Vol. II, p.54

at first, down the broad highway which leads to the city. The industrialization process was driving "full steam ahead;" the Machine Age was in the near distance. America, in Spenglerian terminology, was in this late nineteenth century period passing from its "cultural" to its "civilization" stage.

If prose was our glory in the eighties and nineties, poetry was our apology. Not that we had no poets worthy of the name, nor a body of poetry deserving only of summary dispatch to the scrap-heap. We had Taylor, Aldrich, Stoddard, Stedman, Timrod, Gilder, and a host of others who composed with grace, facility, and often charm, but sadly wanted in creative fire and vigor. Today, it is customary to slight their highly polished and deftly chiseled verses, so reminiscent of late Victorian form and substance patterns, and frequently exuding Orientalism or giving polite voice to nostalgic hankerings for other days and other ways. Looking down upon them from the impermanent heights of the contemporary, we shake our heads wisely,--perhaps justly,--regretting their failure to throw themselves wholeheartedly and with tremendous gusto into the life of which they were a part, in body at least.

Yet even while the old century was feverishly preparing for the advent of the long-anticipated

twentieth, fresh notes were being struck here and there. If the more representative poets of this era of "detachable cuffs," "stereoptican views," "full dinner pails," "Trilby," "the Rough Riders," "infant industries," "phaetons," "Message to Garcia," were content to ignore the noise and confusion which the contemporary has with it always, and seek refuge in their libraries from the none too alluring time-spirit just then beginning to manifest itself, there were others, willing if not always eager, to accept the challenge which a changing America had thrown down. Whitman, "The Father of Them All,"² had long before announced the coming of the new spirit in American poetry, both by precept and example. As Emerson had influenced him, so he later was to become the germinal impulse spurring on the new singers.

Someone has said that if Whitman was not the father of American poetry, then American poetry had no father. It is hardly necessary to recall that Whitman, during practically his whole lifetime and for a number of years afterward, was a voice in the wilderness. Emerson, Thoreau, Burroughs, and a few others of their standing in this country had paid him warm tribute, but, like Poe before him, it was outside the United States that his genius found refuge.

²Ernest Boyd, The American Mercury, VI, 451.

Vincent O'Sullivan presents a severe, and perhaps not altogether unfair, arraignment when he says: "It is possible that democracy produced Whitman, in so far that his work would have been different if he had lived under a monarch. But democracy certainly did not nourish Whitman. It tried to put him in jail, it turned him out of his small post in a government office because he was the author of Leaves of Grass; it let him live in poverty and be buried by charity. The mass of the American people never took the least interest in his poetry during his life, and I don't believe they do now."²

If one should care to go on record as saying that Whitman is primarily a poet's poet (disregarding the extent of his popular appeal) there is no small amount of evidence at hand to lend support to the statement. Hovey and Carman with their "Songs from Vagabondia" come to mind at once, together with Markham, Oppenheim, Sandburg, and the early Untermeyer, in particular, and the whole "new poetry" school of the twentieth century in general.

Just before the dawn of the new century, poets other than certain of these acknowledged disciples were beginning to compose overtures for the new symphony.

³ Living Age, CCCIII, 802.

Emily Dickinson, in the austerity of her narrow New England garden, had for many years been imprisoning beauty, intensity, and vividness in trim little cameos of verse which were destined (much later) to be exhibited in the anthologies of the "moderns;" Stephen Crane, whom Carl Van Doren has called the inaugurator of modern American literature,⁴ was dashing off pungent fragments of vers libre thoroughly "new" in form and substance; William Vaughn Moody was making heroic and often successful attempts to clothe the spirit of Whitman in conventional dress; and Edwin Arlington Robinson, on the threshold of a notable career, was privately printing some verses dedicated "to any man, woman or critic who will cut the edges of it."²

Significant as these indices of a changing poetry climate seem to us today, to regard them as more than flickering storm signs, is to be misled. Quite important they were; typical, they certainly were not. Only intermittent flashes on what was otherwise a lifeless, confused, and imitative literary stage. For the years 1897 and 1899, you will look in vain for any articles under American poetry in "The Readers Guide," an index to periodical literature. American poetry has probably never been in such a low state as it was in the later eighties and throughout the nineties. In

⁴ American Mercury, I;II.

² N.Y. Herald Tribune, Books, IV, 10 (March 12, 1928).

these years the insidious disease which was sapping the native Muse of her life blood, remained largely unnoticed. (During the first decade of the twentieth century the bacillus enervatus was isolated, and consultations began to be held.) The few commentators on poetry in the lean years between, were almost all of them given to the practice of inquiring gravely, "What is Poetry?" The rest of the paper as a rule consisted of nothing more than a piecemeal collection of poetry definitions, starting usually with Aristotle's and ending always with the author's. Another pet diversion of the times was commenting on Gosse's rhetorical query, "Has America Produced a Poet?" which the late Sir Edmund had answered most decisively in the negative.⁶

Specific criticism of poetry still concerned itself with Bryant, Holmes, Emerson, and Longfellow; and the Stedman and Richardson anthologies monopolized the field.

Whitman was seldom mentioned, and if at all, contemptuously. (Of Stedman and a few others this is not true.) The writer who dismissed Whitman's poetry "as pork, not poetry" spoke for multitudes.⁷

It was about this time that winds of doctrine were carrying to our shores exotic literary formulas and esthetic theories like Yellow-Book decadence, continental symbolism, and art for art's sake. They had their vogues, and were then shelved until "husky,

6.

⁷The Forum, VI, 176 - 186.

-Watts, Fortnightly Review, IV, 910.

brawling" America should have more leisure for such non-essentials. Aside from Kipling, whose poetry undoubtedly exerted the greatest outside force upon the "new poetry" movement in its incipience, foreign influence upon American poetry was negligible. While we can say that American poetry "just grew up," we cannot generalize so brusquely about American prose, especially fiction. Fin de siecle America was crying for criticism of its basic structures, and its muckrakers were glad to get any technical hints Russian and French masters of this sort of thing were kind enough to supply.

American literature on the whole, however, was still only a branch of English literature, and a not very promising side-shoot at that. The great body of English writers accepted this condition as a matter of course, and our leading critical spokesman readily admitted it, more often in a spirit of pride than of chagrin. American classics were trying hard to enter the curriculums of our schools by the supplementary reading route. A writer in The Forum viewed with alarm the steady influx of non-Nordic elements into our racestream, which he blamed for the decline of our literature.⁸ Another viewer-with-alarm in the same magazine pointed out the growing tendency of fiction, native and British, to

⁸ S.G. Fisher, XVI, 560-7.

exploit undemocratic customs and attitudes, which he declared would lead eventually to the dilution of our nationalism and the dissipation of our strength.⁹

American drama, never very robust at any time in its history, was sick abed with the French measles. American criticism was practically inoperative; it certainly was not creative or vital.

Thus in such a milieu we find American poetry at the turn of the century: surrounded by sickness and torpor, and sick almost to the death itself. The rich "classical" vein had played out; the harder metal of a new age was not yet being mined in paying quantities. The blustering Anthony Comstock was in the saddle. The heyday of his blustering anti-type, Henry Louis Mencken, had not yet arrived.

⁹Thos. Davidson, XI, 342-49.

CHAPTER TWO

AMERICAN POETRY DURING THE EARLY YEARS

OF

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY (1900-08)

I

If American poetry was not at all well in the nineties, it certainly failed to convalesce very rapidly in the early years of the new century. The umbilical cord joining us with Mother England had not yet been cut, although one writer sadly foresaw that the time was near when the fatal severance would be consummated. Judging from the articles of the period, English critics were almost as solicitous about the state of our poetry as were the native Jeremiahs. Laureate Alfred Austin¹ was lamenting our barrenness in poetry, so in contrast to our richness and productivity in other fields of human endeavor; and Lord Bryce, whose interest in America, apparently, was not exclusively confined to her political institutions, while on a visit to this country, was impolitic enough to ask us a very embarrassing question. He inquired quite rudely, "Who are your poets?"² and though staying for an answer, received none.

If the opinions of these men, regardin American

¹Outlook, LXXXVI, 53-5.

²Ibid.

poetry, can be taken as representative of the English attitude--and we believe they can--then the position of a writer in The Dial,³ who was quick to confirm the validity of Mr. Austin's pessimistic attitude toward our current poetry and current readers of poetry, indicates most clearly our willingness to allow England to diagnose our ailments and occasionally send over medicine. In a review of Stedman's American Anthology,⁴ it is plainly seen that poetry is still wedded to patriotism and lofty idealism, and the writer admits our decided inferiority (in poetry) to England. In another article we find that "the standard of American poetry is necessarily set by the English" and that "Walt Whitman is more akin to us in our failures than in our legitimate and characteristic successes."⁵ And so into the second decade of this century.

But while it is true that American poetry was still considerably hampered in its development by an enfeebling inferiority complex, probably induced in part by a mother-fixation, the record of its illness would be incomplete indeed if we stopped there. Besides the servility and languor so noticeably present in our verse, there were other innumerable faults to

³XXXVI, 353-55.

⁴The Dial, XXXIX, 257-9.

⁵Atlantic Monthly, LXXXVII, 703.

be found with it. It was sadly lacking in originality, both of conception and of expression. The power of invention and the spirit of daring experiment had died out. Any movement other than the iambic was seldom attempted. Simplicity was considered old-fashioned, and a high premium was placed on the unique, the fanciful, and the abstract. "We who live in the flats beneath the Victorian plateau," said John Macy, "try every kind of poetry and succeed in none. Hence--Magazine verse." He goes on to say that current pseudo-poetry can be divided into some fifty groups, and he lists a few like "The Pseudo-Celtic," "Military," "Sonnet in Obscurity," "Nature Poem," "Devotional Poem," "Persian," "Greek," "Allegorical," etc.⁶

During this period, because of the widespread unpopularity of contemporary verse, there was very little publishing of poetry. At intervals an indifferent sheaf of verse was privately issued, but most of the pallid concoctions of the day that were so fortunate as to break into print at all were used merely as fillers for the magazine. This magazine verse, really a species per se, was frequently characterized at the time as terrible, inane, banal stuff. That such effusions were more a matter of cheap ingenuity than of inspiration is obvious.

⁶The Bookman, XXVII, 513-17.

It would be possible to throw into relief even drearier aspects of the native Muse, but we believe that enough evidence has already been set down to indicate the unhappy state of our poetry between the years 1900 and 1908. Save for a stray paean of praise now and then for Hovey, Carman, Markham, Henley, Browning, or Kipling (they were just as often depreciated), a casual reference to some beginner like Robinson, or notice of a sound critical spanking having been administered to some young upstart afflicted with Whitmanitis, all was darkness. The typical poetry of the period, at its best, sang the praises of a glorious past, viewed in melancholy retrospect. At its worst it was sentimental gush or doggerel nonsense. "Neither the misery nor the joy of life finds thrilling voice."⁷

II

If the recognition of a problem is a vital and encouraging preliminary step toward the solution of that problem, then there was reason for being hopeful of the future of American poetry about 1905. It was generally agreed both in England and in this country that the poets of the day were "a crowd of pleasant singers but no heaven-sent choir," a charitable disposition of the matter.

⁷M.H. Shackford, The Dial, XL, 249-53.

Whether American life, crude and uninspiring in so many respects during this coming of age period, was to blame, or whether our poets lacked the courage to break through the rawness and show us the real soul of America is a question.

The fact remains that the poetry of the period was sadly under-nourished and inadequate. But determined efforts were being made to get at the seat of the trouble, and, if possible, to meliorate the condition. For that we should be thankful.

In the March and April, 1905, numbers of The Critic,⁸ there appeared a long article titled "The Slump in Poetry" which may be recommended unequivocally to any one interested in American poetry during the 1900's. More than a score of critics, publishers, and poets tried to find an explanation for the patently obvious decline of poetry. What these persons had to say about the native Muse was enough to drive her into solitary confinement forever. Let us open the case for the prosecution by calling the publishers to the stand.

Mr. John Lane⁹ finds that poetry had paid in the 90's, but does not pay now, despite the fact that poetry is as good or if not better than it was then. He testifies that the writing of poetry is regarded today

⁸XLVI, 263-77; 347-50.

⁹Ibid., p. 264

as a sign of decadence and decadence is not popular now. According to the Houghton, Mifflin Company, fame comes too late to poets: their worth has to be disseminated and inculcated into the public first; appreciation then follows. They find the demand for great poetry increasing. Richard Badger, who catered to young poets, is the exception: "My sales have doubled during each of the last three years."¹⁰

Edwin Markham says we are gravitating toward business too much. We are taught that poetry is fanciful and empty, not worthy of serious attention. He also blames the poets for lack of insight, and declares that poetry is a passion, not a mere purpose... "They sing of the trite and the trivial, of the distant and the dead. They appear to see nothing in the present now.....Poets sing of the over-lauded eyebrow and the long-suffering daisy, while London is thronged with hungry men and St. Petersburg is thundering with the steps of an awakening people.....Poverty of passion..... pettiness of idea.....fripperies of thought and fopperies of phrase.....Let the poet speak with rugged power the significant facts of our existence. Then perhaps the world will hear."¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 347-8.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 347-8.

Joaquin Miller, always refreshing, even when a bit absurd, speaks out against the wordiness of the modern poet: ".....And this is Riley's secret. He uses only little bits of baby words, and as few even of those as possible. I dislike dialect, but I take the stand to say that James Whitcomb Riley has written more real poetry and will reach more hearts than all the rest of us put together.....If your reader wants words, words, words,' let him go buy a dictionary."¹² And there were others who believed that poets like Riley and Markham, homely and socialistic, respectively, pointed out the way.

Florence Coates, Madison Cawein, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, and Henry Van Dyke, to mention but a few, blame the poetry slump on commercialism and its attendant features. The first-named felt that the "strenuous life" is to blame: the football field, the racing track, the gaming table, and the exchange dull the appetite for elevated reading. Cawein laments a scientific age which cares more for entertainment than for culture, while Aldrich weeps in his tent, and Van Dyke defends poetry on the ground that it is not intended to attract attention as do automobiles and soap.

And there were other damaging counts: Magazines do not feature poetry; the public does not want imitative,

¹²Ibid., p. 350

obscure, over-subjective verse; the love of poetry is no longer taught; there are too many books; reviewers are heartless and inept; there is a lack of criticism; not only poetry but good literature as well, is neglected; poetry is too aristocratic; poets preach but don't sing; they are too conventional and academic; readers expect nothing from poetry. To continue would be cruel.

Significant are these words from Robert Bridges:
 "...To the men of imagination (builders, inventors, scientists) who are achieving all these things, with bravery and superb optimism, the contemporary poet has too often fed the husks of a feeble, pessimistic intellect of a doubting soul afraid of its own destiny and whining about it; he has poured his timorous complainings into the mould of verse, and called the product poetry. It isn't poetry. It isn't real metal; it is adulterated and full of air-holes and slag. When a real poet comes, men of imagination, no matter what they are doing, stop and listen to him."¹³

III

That the "new poetry" movement did not strike America like a bolt out of a placid sky is a fact likely to be overlooked by a large number of poetry enthusiasts.

¹³Ibid., p. 275.

Its immediate inception pre-dates Ezra Pound by several years.

Besides the acknowledged "fathers" and occasional dabblers in the freer forms of irregular verse, we early had with us a sort of "new poetry" criticism. There was at least one critic in 1901 who was quite "modern" on Poe and Whitman, and, as might be expected, roundly lambasted New England poetry and criticism. He predicted (how truly only we know) that the twentieth century would swarm with poets, because it seemed easier for aspirations to come to fruition in America than elsewhere.¹⁴ In the same year another prophet foresaw the coming of a new style to go with the new themes and tastes. Other fin de siècle commentators observed a growing tendency to discard the older and more dignified forms. In 1903 the illuminating (when re-discovered much later, startling) discovery was made that downright prose might be written in iambs; and that the most excellent versification will not make a poem, and may not show faultless rhythm. To quote this perspicuous forerunner of Amy Lowell: "Prof. Mark H. Liddell in his Introduction to the Scientific Study of English Poetry calls it Attention-Stress--a rather rough term for it--and which he declares to be the fundamental element in

¹⁴ O.L. Triggs, The Forum, XXX, 630-40.

in shaping our English verse form."¹⁵ This stress material is declared to be the very warp of our verse-- the punctuating material dividing it into varying rhythm lengths.

This same year (1903) a woman wrote in to William Dean Howells as follows: "When poetry conforms in its mental tone to the spirit of the times; when it reflects the life and more or less the common thought of the day, then more of the common people will read it."¹⁶ Howells forwarded her letter to a Woman's Club (of nine ladies) and the gist of their comment was that "it is the very essence and office of poetry not to conform to the mental tone and spirit of the times," and though it might very well reflect the life, it must not reflect the "common thought of the day" upon pain of vulgarizing and annulling itself. Mr. Howells, whose attitude toward current poetry is marked by frequent shifts from time to time, was inclined to side with the ladies, whose position he attempted to amplify and strengthen.

The continually changing attitude of William Dean Howells calls to mind the interesting case of H.W. Boynton. In the year 1902 we find him ranged alongside Horace and the "rules."¹⁷ He patted Robert Underwood Johnson on the back for his nicety and restraint;

¹⁵Harper's Monthly, CVI, 977.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 324

¹⁷Atlantic Monthly, XC, 553-9.

believed that Riley was at his best when he forsook the vernacular, doubted very much the value of Markham's work, which he considered blunt, didactic, rhetorical, and egotistic, and sternly censured Robert Bridges (of all poets) for disregarding the established metrical forms. "It is all right for the Celts," he said, "but not for us of Teutonic blood, who are by inheritance subject to restraint, conformity, and Horace's rules." Three years later his thorough-going classicism appears to have become somewhat attenuated. Now hear him: "Aren't we busy enough with our radium, our murder trials, our imperialism, and what not without being bothered with the learned prettiness of these rhyming fellows? For Heaven's sake let us have a poetry of real life: we have had enough of this 'paintint the thing as it isn't for the Gods of things as they ain't.' Give us a poetry that among other things is not too good for advertising breakfast food."¹⁸ Incidentally, he notes that we are getting rid of the French manner, and that even our sophomores are ceasing to imitate Mr. Dobson.

That something was beginning to happen to America's poetry is the logical conclusion to be drawn from the reading of a Contributor's Club item in the Atlantic Monthly for September, 1907, which denounces

¹⁸The Bookman, XXI, 176.

current rough handlings of the English language.¹⁹ The guilty ones are designated "Whitmanites," and are cauterized as "The Unintelligent in full pursuit of the Unintelligible." They are accused of bullying and mangling words and confecting horrible new ones. The writer says that there are kings of words and tyrants of words: "Virgil and Milton are kings; Browning is a tyrant."

About 1905, the American reading public was neglecting Aldrich, Woodberry, and Moody and beginning to relish Yeats, Maeterlinck, Ibsen, Phillips, and Growning. Kipling alone had a vogue comparable to that of the poets of the last generation. The seeds were being sown; the full crop would come later.

¹⁹Atlantic Monthly, 431-2.

CHAPTER THREE

STIRRINGS (1909-12)

I

In a letter dated 1891,¹ Thomas Bailey Aldrich predicted that for the next twenty years poetry was going to have a hard time of it in America. Never was truer prophecy made. During the few years immediately preceding the bursting of the "new poetry" bomb, the appearance on the horizon of countless phenomena portended the storm which followed. But before chronicling the promising, let us stop to look into the home life of the obstreperous little Muse, prior to her running away to Chicago.

By 1909 America was well on its way to being thoroughly commercialized. In one respect, however, this was not true,—in respect to poetry. Verse was certainly not a paying commodity, opined the publishers. Persons of taste were resigned to the worthlessness of most current verse, and with an air of martyrdom turned to the masterpieces, while those who had no taste sought solace and mental relaxation in Ella Wheeler Wilcox and her kind. As far as she knew, America had no one to compare with Stephen Phillips, Alfred Noyes, or Rudyard

¹The Dial, XLVIII, 307.

Kipling. Edith Wharton, John Erskine, and George Sterling had written good poetry, but for all that they were considered too intellectual. Furthermore, the fear was expressed that they, like Moody (who had left poetry for a handful of dramatic silver, as someone termed it), would desert the Muse for some better-rewarded field. Percy McKaye was taking worthy subjects, "saying the proper things about them, and saying them feelingly and well," but he lacked poetic madness. George E. Woodberry was too cold and academic for many, while George Santayana and Miss Reese were riding too far above the clouds to have a wide appeal.²

If the older poets were, for the most part, out of tune with the modern temper, the same thing could be said of large numbers of the younger rhapsodists. Henry Seidel Canby, in a communication regarding a volume of Yale prize poems, said: "In turning over these prize poems one passes from Shakespeare to Stephen Phillips, from Sophocles to Browning, from the twentieth century to mediaevalism. It is like walking down a new residence street in an American city, where architects have tried their hands at all styles that have been and some that never will be--save that there is nothing in this poetry so monstrous as are half the houses in a city block."³

² B. Hooker, The Forum, XLII, 148-56.

³ The Nation, XCI, 414.

New offerings of verse sporadically trickled from the presses, but little that was very fresh either in manner or in content--almost uniformly conventional. Going through the dispirited reviews of these sheaves, one continually happens on such qualifying expressions as "slight", "slender," "tricksy spirit," "lyric trifling," "sense for blank verse," "expression of a nature essentially religious," and "Celtic whimsy," to name only a few.

Under the heading "Books of the Coming Year,"⁴ a writer in The Dial for September 16, 1912, declared (with justifiable pride) that the biggest thing in poetry was to be the "Collected Works of William Vaughn Moody." There was little else announced in the poetry line (a volume by Olive Tilford Dargan and an anthology or two), and transition was quickly made to the fiction list which was "as usual, of appalling length." The headliners were: Mary Johnston, David Graham Phillips, W.J. Locke, and Maarten Maartens. A few more that "seem promising" (Wharton's The Reef, Deeping's The Strong Hand, etc.) were merely listed.

That poetry had been steadily losing prestige since Wordsworth's death in 1850, and had become a sort of innocuous joke to the ordinary man during these "calm"

⁴LIII, 179-81.

years, seemed to have been the general opinion of time. Men were getting very little satisfaction from poetry, though the Muse numbered her followers by the hundreds. Tons of verse-stuffing were being "tossed off," but lacking as it did in zest and body, its appeal was negligible. In England, George Moore was reported as foreseeing the death of art, and Sir Edmund Gosse was of the opinion that never again would there be a great poet in English--or any other language "worn and rubbed by use."⁵

While our current literary output was sorely in need of attention, grave doubts were expressed by many as to whether it was deserving of much. Mr. G.F. Parker,⁶ before the literary societies of Washington and Lee, presuming our lack of a glorious present, exhorted us to dedicate our energies to the task of rescuing and vivifying our golden past. According to him, we had no biographers, no fiction, no criticism, and most assuredly no poetry. In fairness to Mr Parker, it should be added that he fell far short of striking the bed rock of pessimism. In 1910, Charles Leonard Moore of The Dial, was emphatic in saying that in America tragedy and cockroaches are as one; and that our humor was like dishwater and weak tea.⁷

⁵ Literary Digest, XLV, 555.

⁶ Review of Reviews, XLI, 498-9.

⁷ The Dial, XLVIII, 308.

II

At about the same time that the Governor of the Canal Zone was making a terrible nuisance of himself by boarding incoming steamships and reading rhymed addresses of welcome to the most distinguished visitors aboard,⁸ the poetry heavens in America and elsewhere began to take on a queer, even sinister aspect. In 1909 (the year of Personae and Exultations) word came to America of the founding of a new school of philosophy and literature, called Futurism. The next year appeared a review of The Tramp's Excuse by Nicholas Vachel Lindsay, the portentous Younger Choir, and volumes from Cale Young Rice, John G. Neihardt, John Myers O'Hara, and James Oppenheim. In 1911, the last mentioned poet suggested a number of planks for the "new poetry" platform. Then--then, come 1912--and Poetry: A Magazine of Verse. It was in this momentous year, also, that the redoubtable Ezra Pound, whom Idaho (in the fullest sense) gave to the world of letters, began to cultivate an American audience. All of these things were happening, it should be remembered, at a time when the bulk of American poetry was flat and tasteless. We had the leaven, but we also had the lump.

Futurism today, taking its positive triumphs

⁸ The Dial, I, 113-14.

(if any) along with its many miscarriages, is a multi-planed phenomenon, but in its origin simplicity was the keynote, based as it seems to have been on a Nietzschean framework. Among the tenets of this creed, as announced by M. Marinetti,⁹ were: the glorification of war, danger, and action; the destruction of museums and libraries; opposition to feminism, moralism, and utilitarian cowardice; singing of the masses and "the multicolored, polyphonic surf of revolution,"

After dispensing with Futurism, even James Oppenheim may appear a bit effeminate. But if M. Marinetti declared courage, audacity, and revolt--a struggling with unknown forces--to be the essential elements of poetry, Mr. Oppenheim, in his vigorous advocacy of "rough edges, strong music, concise vigor, daring technique" for the poetry of today, is not so far behind him. "In order that man in relation to his skyscraper be expressed," proclaimed Mr. Oppenheim, "must we not hear the thump of the air-hammer on the red-hot rivets, must we not hear the roar of the gale as it twangs the steel strings of the skeleton, must we not feel the daring of the men who walk the two-foot beam five hundred feet from the street below? And must not the noise and confusion, the stir and color of a modern city be felt like an undertone?"¹⁰

⁹ The Bookman, XXIX, 548-7.

¹⁰ Review of Reviews, XLIII, 729.

The year before in a review of The Younger Choir (a promising collection which included contributions from Louis Untermeyer, G.S. Viereck, Ridgely Torrence, Seumas O'Sheel, and W.E. Leonard), Richard Le Gallienne expressed the same hope, predicting that sometime our poets would sense the beauty in grain elevators and bridges, "as you draw into St. Louis or Chicago, for instance, in some misty sunrise."¹¹ At the moment he could discover no commanding voice, but he detected a stirring, and felt that perhaps Whitman was right when he prophesied that the Muses would migrate "from Greece and Ionia" to America.

September 23, 1912, is an important date in the history of American poetry. On that day appeared the first number of Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, ahead of schedule because of the pronouncement of a Boston rival which threatened to absorb its title and begin a month sooner. Pound, Lindsay, Lowell, Ficke, and a host of others sent felicitations. The fight was on. Poets can't make a living, said Miss Monroe.¹² Literary criticism is too decentralized, while the poet's public is too colonial in taste, all too prone to take London and Paris opinion as gospel. The public apathy toward poetry is more apparent than real: interest in

¹¹ The Forum, XLIII, 651-60.

¹² Review of Reviews, XLVI, 746.

poetry is not dead; it is merely scattered and unaware. What is needed most is an organized effort to unite and inform it. Therefore, Poetry.

Other little reviews dedicated to the rehabilitation of poetry sprang up, a few to carry on, the rest to fall quickly by the way. Almost a year was to pass, before these pioneer journals began to be taken seriously. In December of this same year, a writer in The Dial, welcoming the appearance of The Poetry Review, Poet Lore, and "the delightful little monthly published in Chicago," pointed out that "some think it (Poetry) will become a 'house of refuge' for minor poets."¹³ Whether it did or not is a matter of opinion; but that it had come into existence and was destined to play an important role in the "new poetry" offensive about to be launched, are facts which may not go unconsidered.

And there were other signs that American poetry was entering upon a new era. The native Muse seemed to be considering quite seriously the idea of leaving the country and establishing herself in town. Delicacy and straint were giving way to bolder expression; prizes were being offered to encourage and stimulate fresh and original achievements (The Lyric Year); onerous distinctions between poetry and verse were breaking down; the opening guns of the free verse battle were being fired;

¹³LIH, 478.

the case of rhythm was reopened; and there was evidence that the wanderjahre of Poe and Whitman were at an end.

The leaven had begun to work.

III

It was apparent from the very beginning that the "new poetry" movement was not going to be allowed to have its own way with conventions and traditions, the long-accumulating heritage of centuries, unchallenged. During these crucial years, the insurgents may have had their Oppenheims, their Monroes, and their Pounds, but the great (and often good) god Conservatism was not wanting for champions, either.

To many neutral readers, the coming of a new vocabulary, hard-hitting and plain-speaking, was a welcome relief, but as one of their representatives put it, "there is a time for gloves and a time to go without gloves, but with clothes it is vastly different!"¹⁴

Very few times in the history of revolt has the swing of the pendulum been marked by moderation. Poetry tended to take the world as it was, waiving, in too many cases, all the privileges of artistic selection. The gilded cage of romance had not merely been deserted for a time; it had been bolted. Its renovation was not even considered. The Muse had decided to come down and

live among men--and she was not above going slumming either.

But if certain disciples of the new Muse like Masefield and Gibson could really sing of the dirt and the slime, there were countless hangers-on who succeeded only in gathering together huge masses of unsavory data in the name of poetry. And it was this "lunatic fringe," which no revolution is ever without, that fueled, in large part, the fires of reaction.

Too many prosaic souls, it was charged, were trying to express themselves in verse, with nothing to say and clothing their vacuity in shoddy, undisciplined dress. Simply one type of poetaster was being replaced by another. Others bewailed the decline of reticence and urged a return to the spirituality and high seriousness of puritanism, as an antidote for the prevalent flippancy. Frequent calls were sent out for a new romantic revival: it is the poet's function to soar; too many are soiling their wings in the mire.

Though Whitman was on his way home, consent to receive him was by no means unanimous. Whitman, "with his amorphous verse and his doctrines borrowed from Emerson and the Hindus and badly understood,"¹⁵ could not, according to Professor Gummere, be called the poet of democracy in its ideal sense because he rejected

¹⁵ The Dial, XLIX, 107

"the democratic idea of submission to the highest social order, to the spirit of laws, to that imagined community." The reviewer of Professor Gummere's book implies that the race has "inherited the feeling for rhythm to such an extent that Whitman's indifference to this shall of itself consign him to oblivion."¹⁶

It is interesting to note how at this period the names of Whitman and Browning were so often linked together. If we are to believe the reviewer quoted above, Browning's popularity was waning, and, while acknowledging his skill as a metrist, he questions whether there was not "in both Browning and Whitman a certain lack of artistic restraint, a certain failure to apprehend what is the true realm of poetry, which is a matter not only of rhythm but of atmosphere, of truly heightened feeling."¹⁷

William Watson, over here in 1912 to take part in the Dickens Commemoration in New York and to lecture on poetry, was of the opinion that Browning would survive only "as a huge mental and moral force expressing itself in meter by a kind of ironic accident." What he thought of Whitman was, perhaps, better left unsaid. Mr. Watson also be rated Kipling, and spoke out loudly against the

¹⁶The Dial, LI, 525.

¹⁷Ibid., 525.

¹⁸The Century, LXI (n.s), 948

insidious influence of the novel which was upsetting the balance of power among the kingdoms of literature. Nothing less than the noblest criticism and the most serious poetry would satisfy him, and innovation of any kind was anathema. One writer believed that Mr. Watson's lecture on poetry would give perceptible impetus to the study and appreciation of the art--and it doubtless did.

In many quarters, during this period when lines were being drawn and intermittent skirmishes were occurring, Stedman and Aldrich were hailed as classics. There were large numbers of persons to whom the increasingly noticeable tendency on the part of so many new poets to glorify themes which previously had been non-existent or considered as very unlikely poetic material was deplorable. These poets lacked sincerity and largeness. Their subject matter was ugly and their language coarse and often disgusting. They lacked sincerity and largeness of vision, it was charged. As was grudgingly said of Masfield, "although sincere he is a bar-room Byron."¹⁹

Just before the storm broke, the attitude toward the insurgent tendencies in American poetry, which I have tried to indicate, was the prevailing one. Conservative opinion, as a whole, while recognizing the need for greater

¹⁹ The Century, LXII (n.s.), 635

freshness and vigor, was far from willing to give its indorsement to the "new poetry" movement. Like the lady who occasionally discovered a tiny lyrical gem tucked away in the humble corner of some magazine, there were those who so loved verse that they would continue to read on, "hearing, above the honk of automobiles, the blasts of mills, the grind of wheels, and the frenzied babblings of factions, the still small voice of Song."²⁰

²⁰The Dial, LII, 308

CHAPTER FOUR

THE STORM BREAKS

I

If it is true that the "new poetry" movement was not an over-night flare-up, it is equally true that Chicago did not become the literary capital of the United States with the founding of Poetry. According to Samuel Putnam, Chicago, twice in her history, either came close to being, if, indeed she was not, the literary capital of the United States. During the decade from 1892 to 1902, she had her glorious hour, and again during her "renaissance," the period from 1912 to 1918. After the war, Chicago's literary and cultural influence waned, and her creative fires began to burn low. Today, they continue to flicker weakly.

But in 1912, as Mr. Putnam points out, "Harriet Monroe suddenly conceived the idea of starting a magazine, the first of its kind in the country and the parent of a dreadful progeny, to be devoted exclusively to the publication of poetry. When, in October, 1912, she left her elocution class to become the editor of Poetry, the odds were all in favor of its being as innocuous as its successors and imitators have,

without exception, turned out to be. It might have been merely a small town airing place for maidenly inanities in verse; but by a miracle it wasn't. The moment, it appeared, was ripe. The seed which had been planted back in the nineties, and which had flowered so brilliantly about 1902, was now, after a winter of creative dullness, to bear fruit. Sandburg had mastered that idiom which the bo and the hunky and the American citizen speak. Anderson had learned much of the same subject from another angle. Masters was transferring his activities from the lower Mississippi to the head of Lake Michigan, and Vachel Lindsay was buying a round-trip ticket from Springfield to Chicago. The 'renaissance' was on."¹

It is possible that Poetry's preeminence and early success were due in no small part to the fact that it had enemies who were willing to pay their most savage respects to it.

One of the first attacks which Miss Monroe was obliged to face was one launched by Professor R.M. Alden of the University of Illinois. In his opinion literature was becoming infected with the "baccilli Futuri," and Poetry was in large part responsible. "I have one other humble aim in writing this letter,"

h

¹ American Mercury, VIII, 421.

he states. "Being at present an eligible witness from the great Middle West whence this magazine Poetry arises, I wish to offer my testimony that here abounds, as elsewhere, the two kinds of readers that alone count in the long run: the great mass of the plain people, and the great mass of the truly cultivated--the readers and teachers of literature. When Mr. Noyes was lately here, his Elizabethan ballads and Victorian lyrics were received with really notable enthusiasm--not because he is a great poet (whether he is or no is not implied), but because he speaks the language, metrical, emotional, and ethical of our race. If the contributor to Poetry (Pound) were to appear among us, urging his songs to

Dance and make people blush,

without the riot of advertising which preceeded the paintings of the kindred school, his work would also attract two classes of admirers, but two classes which are fortunately small in number--the frankly lascivious and the devotees of art nouveau. 'So hath it been, so be it,' whether in the vicinity of Chicago or the antipodes."²

As was to be expected Miss Monroe and Miss Henderson found several weaknesses in Mr. Alden's indictment.³ For one thing, they said, he limited his criticism to one editorial and to the work of one poet, Pound. Furthermore he failed "to distinguish between

2nd

The Nation, XCVI, 386-7.

The Nation,

XCVI, 441

the understanding and application of an artistic tradition and a slavish imitation of outward characteristics." And though admitting an incomplete understanding of the "new art," he proceeds to draw arbitrary conclusions regarding it. While protesting their reverence and respect for the old, the editors of Poetry tried to make it clear that what they wanted was new poetry, fresh and original, and not "rehashed classics," "As for Mr. Pound's poetry," they stated, "it is its own best defence."

And there were others who could appreciate neither Poetry nor Mr. Pound. Mr. Wallace Rice in a letter to The Dial, was grieved because Poetry had shown no inclination to search out poets who, although their best work was at variance with prevailing magazine standards, were deserving of attention and aid nevertheless. "So far," he continued, "there has been little done in these directions. The quest has seemingly been for the bizarre, for the astonishing, for the novelty for novelty's sake, even for the shocking. The paper of the magazine has been poor, the type that of the newspapers, the cover and form inadequate to the dignity of the cause, the proofreading heedless. The editor too seldom allows a number to go out without

³ The Nation, XCVI, 241.

containing her own verses, though these show a steady retrogression from a once high standard. Her own sense of self-criticism in abeyance, Mr. Pound was bound to occur."⁴

After Miss Monroe had obly parried this acidulous thrust, Mr. Rice returned to the attack. Regarding seven poems which Miss Monroe had referred him to, Mr. Rice had this to say: "Eliminating from these the metrical rubbish of Mr. Lindsay, the prose of Mr. Tagore and Mr. Pound, and the lines of Mr. Yeats, which are much the least poetic of his yet printed, it leaves three poems to which she may point with pride as the result of more than half a year of earnest endeavor."⁵

William Rose Benet, confident that after all is said and done the question of good and bad in poetry hinges on individual taste, declared that the only poem of distinction among all those to which Miss Monroe had referred Mr. Rice was Lindsay's "General Booth" (which Mr. Rice had dismissed as "metrical rubbish".) After praising Mr. Pound's earlier efforts, Mr. Benet also concludes that something unfortunate has happened to Mr. Pound in the meantime. "How may a man be a popular poet and yet save his soul and his art?" reads a

CCCC

⁴ The Dial, LIV, 370-1.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 449-50.

very recent editorial in the little magazine Poetry. We might add 'How may a man be a modern poet and yet save his sense of taste and his sense of humor?'--⁶ Whether Mr. Benet would reaffirm this statement today is a question.

Miss Monroe felt that Mr. Benet was expecting a little too much when he found only one masterpiece in the first seven months of Poetry's existence, and was seemingly much disappointed because there had been no more. "Poetry endeavors, however imperfectly," she said, "to give the poet a chance to be heard, to gather together his public, and to reward him, though inadequately for his work. It would like to give as many prizes as the Art Institute does, viz., nearly thirty a year, ranging from ten dollars to a thousand. It would like to pay its contributors so handsomely that a good poet could earn as fair a living as a good painter, or at least as fair as many bad painters who seem to support families without difficulty... others could doubtless do the work better; but no one else has attempted it."⁷

And there were bouquets for Poetry as well as bodyblows. Mr. H. B. Hinckley, in commenting on a

⁶The Dial, LIV, 450.

⁷Ibid., p. 497.

poetry speech by Mr. Yeats, paid the following compliment to Poetry: "This gallant little periodical has done good service in publishing original poetry, some of which is of real distinction. I particularly like the April number."

A great many persons firmly believed that Poetry⁸, The Poetry Journal, and others of their kind were encouraging signs, indicating the arrival of a new era in American poetry. While there was frequent doubt expressed as to whether these little journals would be able to win and hold a very large or a very important following, at the same time there was a quite general tendency to regard the experiments with respect and attention.

And that was something.

II

From about 1900 to the close of the first decade of the present century, poetry was given relatively little attention; but in 1913, a writer in The Nation expressed the fear that we were taking poetry altogether too seriously, and he warned our poets to relax, lest this strained manner should result in the absence of simplicity and naturalness in their expression.⁹ It is typical of America that she has

⁸ The Outlook, CIII, 243-44.

⁹ The Nation, XCVI, 173-4.

never been satisfied with any thing that falls short of being the greatest or the best, and our poets, in their endeavor to emulate the masters, instead of attempting only to be themselves, have often plunged into the depths of absurdity. Catastrophes were certain to occur, when, as W.A. Bradley pointed out, "Even in a Presidential year poetry has managed to attract to itself no small share of continuous attention, and for one reason or another poets have been almost as conspicuously in the public eye as politicians."¹⁰

The American poetical world was indeed throbbing with life. The publishers were singing a different tune now. Mr. George P. Brett, President of the Macmillan Company, believed that a new golden age of poetry had begun. For the first time since Tennyson, poets had broken into the "best-seller" class. More than 100,000 copies of one of Tagore's books were reported to have been sold in America. It was now becoming possible for a poet to make a respectable living from his verses alone. Until recently, to find a volume of contemporary verse in almost any bookstore involved a long quest; now the poetry shelves in the larger bookstores were filled. The standard magazines began to print more and more verse, while numerous periodicals devoted exclusively to poetry were prospering.

The Poetry Society of America, born into very humble circumstances in 1910, was literally besieged by would-be members.

This sudden interest in poetry may be accounted for in part by the evident willingness of the poets to take all the immediate facts of contemporary existence for their province. For a long time poets had been wandering off to the city for inspiration and subject matter; now they began to stampede in that direction. The long-neglected blast-furnaces of Pittsburgh and kindred colossi of an industrial civilization began to quicken poetic imaginations. Even Percy McKay made a courageous, though rather feeble attempt to sonnet an automobile, and Stephen Phillips had about the same degree of success with an aeroplane.¹¹

It follows naturally that this changing attitude toward the harder and more material phases of American life should result in a growing emphasis on sex and the physical, as it began to be reflected on the stage, and in the magazines, newspapers, and current literature. America was getting the hot glare of Realism full in the face. The old social and economic order had broken down many years before; the old cultural and literary order, long only a shell, now followed suit.

¹¹The Nation, XCVII, 558-9.

"Your literature, ah, I have no hope!"

George Brandes exclaimed, while on a short visit to this country in 1914. "Your books are written by old maids for old maids... Ah, if your men who write only had the courage, the daring of those who fashion your buildings, or make your automobiles, or fly your aeroplanes, then you might have a literature."¹² At home, we had John Macy, at that time a professed literary insurgent, to startle readers out of their smug complacency.

And there was additional evidence that a new era of creation and criticism in literature was about to be born. The author of the "Lettres Americaines" of the Mercur de France was importuning American publishers to send him American books to review in order to show Frenchmen that we do something "besides coin dollars and pack pork." And, too, American periodicals were springing up, and a number of long-established ones were installing new editors and embarking upon new policies. As was pointed out at the time, magazines, like human beings, run their course and are supplanted by children of the age. Many even believed that our journalism held greater promise than our literature, and this same belief is

¹²The Independent, LXXVIII, 484.

still voiced today.

Whether The New Republic, founded in 1914 by a group of young men including Herbert Croy, Francis Hackett, and Walter Lippmann, should be credited to the account of journalism or of literature is another one of those questions I shall leave unanswered. The fact remains that this journal of liberal opinion has played no small part in making modern American literature conscious of its peculiar needs and problems. In an early issue of this weekly appeared an editorial, a portion of which seems appropriate here without comment: "English literature will continue to mean much to Americans. But even if we have suffered for years the immense drawback of educational and journalistic subordination, the time seems to have come when Americans realize that for our own peculiar life we need interpreters and critics who speak, if not a distinct language, at least the language of a distinct people."¹³

And then there was the war. It is possible that writings dealing with the effect of this war upon life and letters far exceed in volume actual war literature itself. That this terrible holocaust exerted considerable influence upon American literature in general and our "new poetry" movement in particular is conceded. But to blame the "younger generation," for all of the

¹³New Republic, I, 11.

weird experiments in free verse, and most of the modern realistic horrors at its doorstep, as so many usually intelligent critics have done on occasion, is a case in point of loose thinking and blurred perspective. Rather, as far as American poetry is concerned, it acted as a sort of catalytic agent, mere accelerating tendencies and processes which were already well under way. In 1914, some, like A. S. Adcock,¹⁴ saw war as a blighting curse, and questioned its value to man and the world; others like Charles Leonard Moore,¹⁵ conceived of the conflict as a sort of godsend, a purging agent, especially to literature. "For ourselves," said Mr. Moore, "we think that this combative instinct is the glory of our race - that it is a main force which keeps humanity from becoming dull, listless, enervated, and enslaved to sordid materiality. Ideal Love, Religion, and War are the three royal poetic strands in the web of life, and no one of them can be spared in the weaving."

The foregoing opinion of Mr. Moore, were it given expression today, would receive much more attention than was probably accorded to it at the time.

¹⁴The Living Age, CCLXXXIII, 407.

¹⁵The Dial, LVII, 241.

III

Coincidental with the "poetry boom," the contemptuous attitude of the Muse-about-town toward her "country cousin," the changing magazines, and the outbreak of the World War, criticism of poetry began to change its front. Too many of the older criteria and standards were found to be inadequate, fundamentally unsound, or arbitrary. All along the line simplicity and assurance were giving way to complexity and uncertainty. The conventional categories were too narrow and inflexible. The status of man in relation to his universe was being altered. The verities were falling before the ruthless bludgeonings of science and the tough-minded Pragmatists.

To expect poetry and the criticism of poetry to preserve its classic poise in such a milieu is to place oneself in a ridiculous position. American poetry, following the example of American fiction, had for some time been making furtive overtures to the New Age. By 1914 it had practically capitulated; and for poetry criticism, if it hoped to be tonic and vital, there was but one thing left to do: do likewise - and that it did.

Many were the problems which American critics began to tackle in real earnest. One of the questions which had long been crying for serious attention, and if possible, settlement once for all, was the matter of our slavish imitation of British literary models and our proverbial bowing and scraping to British critical opinion. On numerous occasions in the past, America had been called upon to assert her literary rights, and there was much evidence to be found in our body of literature that these exhortations had not gone altogether unheeded. Now, during the years under immediate consideration, came the quite general realization that American literature had come to the parting of the ways; the long-period apprenticeship to England had been served.

Russell Hart probably went to the crux of the dilemma when he said that..."there is always a sufficiently strong inclination among American reviewers to out-English the English themselves in doing justice to poets of genius, to regard any voice with London accent, be it little or large, as of more real importance than any that is American."¹⁶ It was such a situation as just pictured that was drawing the fire of the new voices in American criticism. English ancestry, and tradition, noble and admirable in themselves, had been hypnotizing us to our

¹⁶North American Review, CXCVIII, 415.

own detriment, and the sooner American literature came out of the trance the better for all concerned. As for our poetry, any innovation, spontaneous or imported, that ran counter to English tradition and practice was at once suspected. Furthermore, it was much easier to laugh such seeming inanities out of court than to attempt to overhaul a set of critical apparatus which was in many respects, worn out. The result of all this was - American criticism.

Another encouraging omen was the changing critical attitude toward poetry. American poetry had been suffering long and grievously from a lack of first-rate critical attention. In times past the feeling was prevalent that the worth of second-hand English poetry written in America could best be estimated by a literary judiciary composed of Britishers. But now that we had begun to produce in ever increasingly larger quantities strictly indigenous American poetry, more and more strictly American criticism of poetry followed of necessity.

Ignorant, prejudiced reviewers in large numbers we had with us then, as we shall have with us always. That the criticism and appreciation of current poetry were lost arts was frequently voiced; and the cry that America had no poets of any importance could still be heard. Many

of our tired sophisticates groaned resignedly, wondering why it was that America had no Berlin or Paris or London to turn to for critical guidance and mental exhaltation. Such men as Brownell, Woodberr, and Phelps, who had it within their power to exercise a steadying and sanative influence upon the "new poetry" movement, were content to "swim in nothing more recent than Victorian critical waters."¹⁷

If the manifestations noted above could rightly be taken as a true index to the state of American poetry during 1913 and 1914, one would certainly be justified in doubting the existence of a "new poetry" movement at all. But representative they certainly were not. They were merely the last faint echoes of a tradition which had lost contact with contemporary reality. The fires of revolt were beginning to flare up menacingly. The time had come when it was necessary to fight fire with fire. The ivory tower variety of conservatism would not suffice to save those cultural heritages of the past that were worth preserving, or be powerful enough to keep the new tendencies within reasonable bounds.

Ignoring, for the present, those many heralds of the new dawn in American poetry to whom reference

¹⁷North American Review, CXCVIII, 414.

has already been made, let us take a look at the more representative aspects of American criticism of poetry.

H. T. Pulsifier expressed the opinion of many, and incidentally emphasized a point which critics are continually losing sight of, in stating that "When readers learn that poetry was made for man, and when the critical cults learn that man was not made for poetry, it may serve to moderate the condescending aloofness of both."¹⁸ Like most bromidic operations, this one is founded on facts, and the same idea was amplified to good advantage by Max Eastman in his book, The Enjoyment of Poetry, which was enjoying a wide vogue about this time (1913) and doing its bit toward getting our neglected Muse back into the good graces of society.

Zola, when asked why he applied the term "Naturalism" to a method of literary approach which was as old as the centuries, answered: "I know all that. You are perfectly right. But I needed a name to attract the attention of the public. When I repeat the word over and over, it is bound at last to make people think there is something in it. It is like driving a nail. The first blow does not amount to much; but as you add another, another, and another, in the end you make

¹⁸The Outlook, CIII, 260.

progress."¹⁹ Thus Gamaliel Bradford attempted to justify in part his use of the word "psychograph." Perhaps we could in all fairness forgive Mr. Louis Untermeyer²⁰ (or whoever it really was) for having coined - or at least publicized - the expression "The New Poetry." This expression, along with other popular catchwords like "The New Morality," "The New Freedom," and "The New Criticism," was a timely one and undoubtedly possessed a certain amount of functional value regardless of the actual degree of "newness" which the term supposedly covered.

Whether or not Mr. Untermeyer invented a term which stands primarily for a particular emphasis rather than for an originally conceived poetry genre, he must by all means be given credit for the part he played in formulating those critical doctrines which were based on this emphasis.

This new critical religion might be, with all due respect, characterized as the cult of the "Now." Mr. Untermeyer, among others, was actively engaged in the business of snatching lost souls out of the sloughs of the past, and dragging them into the saving light of

¹⁹ A Naturalist of Souls, p. 3.

²⁰ The Bookman, XL, 202.

contemporary reality. He preached that the "new poet" should forego whatever pertains to the past - treating only what is coeval, and as a logical corollary, he should also throw overboard all the impedimenta attending formal expression.²¹ Mr. Untermeyer may have fallen into a deep critical well in carrying the idea of temporality in art to such extreme limits, but it is possible that the mistake was worth making, nevertheless. "The trouble," said that conservative critic, Mr. Charles Leonard Moore, "is that rhetoric is within the reach of almost everyone who can write at all; and if the person using it possesses also the gift of musical speech, the ordered movement of verse, he can easily set up for a great poet."²² If the freer forms were dangerously susceptible to widespread abuse, the same admission must be made with respect to the traditional verse patterns.

Were it both necessary and wise to attempt to state in a few words the essence of all the major manifestations of the new spirit in American poetry criticism, I believe I should appropriate the following statement: "It (poetry) is real only as it arises spontaneously out of the depths of living human

²¹The Bookman, XL, 202.

²²The Dial, LVI, 132.

experience."²³

Poetry of that sort was now being written.

IV

In 1913 and the year following came generous offerings of fruit, ripe, and not so ripe, from the "modern" poets' garden of verse. Some, like Lindsay, Frost, and Lowell, sent well-filled baskets; others, like Sandburg, proffered samples.

One of the most interesting as well as "significant" collections of the new and fresh in the way of poetry was The Lyric Year, which appeared in the latter part of 1912. In this volume were included the three prize poems (of Johns, Daly, and Sterling) and an "also-ran" contribution titled "Renaissance," written by Edna St. Vincent Millay at the age of nineteen.

C. Vale,²⁴ writing of The Lyric Year in The Forum, called it not a book but an event. "The vitality of a nation is measured by its poetry," he asserted, and declared that The Lyric Year was not a mere collection, but rather a thermometer by which we could ascertain the national temperature. He was also quite prescient in the matter of "Renaissance," of which he said: "This

²³Harper's Monthly, CXXVI, 316.

²⁴The Forum, XLIX, 101-2.

may not be the finest poem in the book; but to me it is the most notable....It is a remarkable production for a girl of twenty,- remarkable for its freshness, its spirituality, its renunciation of artifice, and its unmistakable power."

Mr. Braithwaite, among others, hailed it enthusiastically, too, but as far as a critic in The North American Review was concerned, our country would have been just as well off had it never been published. "Most of the material therein is pretty sorry stuff," he grumbled. After pointing out that very few of the contributors were known at all, and that the exceptions, like Carman and Conkling, contributed only second or third rate pieces, he added, "The last mentioned (the only child in the book) was doubtless included for entirely personal reasons; but to do so is to make any wise person tremble for the child's welfare, no less than to detract from the dignity and significance of the volume." ²⁵ We wonder if by any chance he was alluding to Edna St. Vincent Millay.

At about the same time that The Lyric Year fell into the hands of the reviewers, the following comment on Lindsay's "General Booth" was quoted in the Literary Digest. There are many contemporary poets who

²⁵ North American Review. C X X V I I, 284.

mistake intensity for power, rhetorical display for beauty of phrase. But there are exceptions. Here, for instance, is a poem taken from Poetry: A Magazine of Verse. Mr. Lindsay always writes with sincerity and vigor. In these lines he shows an enthusiasm which redeems even the most startling expressions from the suspicion of irreverence."²⁶

In 1914 appeared Challenge, Songs for the New Age, and North Boston (David Nutt, London). Mr. Untermeyer's Challenge, said a reviewer in The Nation, "divides itself into two parts. The first a miscellany of types, narrative, descriptive, dialectical, allegorical, fanciful, erotic, producing a miscellany of impressions-impression of study and negligence, of smoothness and harshness, of platitude and originality, of beauty and repulsion, of freak and poise. The second is a much smaller group of much abler poems, praiseworthy less for their value as poetry than as clear-cut dicta, which add to plain and pointed language the reinforcing crispness of verse."²⁷

A. C. Henderson found Oppenheim's Songs for the New Age strongly reminiscent of Whitman, but only "the outward form without the warmth of the inner spirit." The writer explained that where Whitman's verse was

²⁶ XLVI, 541.

²⁷ The Nation, XCIX, 248-250.

rhythmic rather than metrical. Oppenheim's was neither. He resembled Whitman at the latter's choppy, prosaic worst, and with Oppenheim the spirit of revolt had hardened into platitude, correct, perhaps, but uninspiring.

Frost's North of Boston the above reviewer characterized as conveying an impression of life such as we get in Conrad or James. She sees Frost as being neither romantic nor realistic in his attitude toward nature, but rather as giving to us a direct and living sense of it. While expressing the belief that many will find him dull and will object to his verse structure, and admitting that his monosyllabic monotony is irritating, she nevertheless feels that "any less drab monotony of rhythm" would have been not quite so successful in communicating the particular aspect of life presented. Like Masfield, Lawrence, and Gibson, he attempts to express "the gesture and the feeling of everyday life in something other than 'the grand style'."

The March 16, 1914, number of The Dial contained an unsigned article under the title "New Lamps for Old,"²⁸ which is certainly eligible for inclusion in any collection of "Notorious Literary Attacks." The impulse to quote from it at length cannot be resisted, and my only hope is that the excerpts which follow will be their own excuse for being:

²⁸The Dial, LVII, 253-5.

²⁹The Dial, LVI, 231-3.

"...The typographical arrangement of this jargon (Sandburg's "Chicago") creates a suspicion that it is intended to be taken as some form of poetry, and the suspicion is confirmed by the fact that it stands in the forefront of the latest issue of a futile little periodical described as 'a magazine of verse'...

"The definition which should allow admission of these chunks of inchoate observation to the sacred precincts of the muse would not be a definition of any form at all, for all definitions of art must say or imply that beauty is an essential aim of the worker, and there is no trace of beauty in the ragged lines we have quoted or in the whole piece of which it is the opening. It is not even doggerel, for doggerel at least admits no aesthetic claim of any description and acknowledges subordination to no kind of law. We are told that the author 'left school at the age of thirteen, and worked in brick-yards, railroads, Kansas wheat fields, etc.,' which we can well believe. That education might have made him a poet we will concede; that these unregulated word-eruptions earn for him that title we can nowise allow. There are many ways of acquiring an education, no doubt, and the academic is by no means the only one that leads to culture, but in these 'hog-butcher' pieces there is no

discernible evidence that culture has been attained. At the risk of being set upon the bad eminence of the reviewer who advised Keats to go back to his pills and ointments, we are inclined to suggest that this author would be more at home in the brick yard than on the slope of Parnassus. ...If the 'Ahkoond of Swat' type of verse is to be accepted as a normal form of the lyric, all the old aesthetic canons must go by the board."

As many, at least, might expect, it was a woman (not, strangely enough, Miss Monroe), Miss Edith Wyatt,³⁰ who had the great temerity to reply in an equally sharp and devastating manner to this vitriolic outburst. In her spirited defense of "Chicago," she pointed out that "it would have been fairer to compare Mr. Sandburg's work with that of other singers of somewhat the same method than with the verse of singers of an entirely different musical tradition. The call of poetry for the feet of young men will always, to my own belief, cry along very differing trails,"

After reading in the year of grace, 1928,³¹ that Carl Sandburg had been elected a member of the Harvard Chapter of Phi Beta Kappa, and had read the annual Phi Beta Kappa poem (shades of Emerson and Woody) at Cambridge this commencement, we pause--just another rhymers come to justice, or a transitional age flaunting a set of

³⁰The Dial, LVI, 375-6.

³¹College Humor, Vol. XV, No. 2, p. 130.

poetic values which posterity will turn its back on?

At any rate, this much must be written into the record:

"The 'new poetry' storm had broken."

CHAPTER FIVE

The Sturm und Drang Period

I

Along toward the end of 1914 came the deluge. The "new poetry" movement during its "peak" years might, with a large measure of exactness, be said to have had its analogue in the great world conflict which simultaneously for four, long, drunken, and bloody years threatened to dash Western civilization on the rocks. It was indeed a hectic period in the history of American poetry, and, as in the case of the war, the effects were volcanic and far-reaching. Critical heads were broken right and left with unfeeling abandon. Cults sprang up overnight, the poetry heavens were surcharged with strange doctrines, while below, the literary terrain was covered with the dead and dying who had given their all (in many cases, not much) to make verse free. And there were heavy casualties in the camp of the reactionaries, as well. Those equable ones who preferred supple opinions to inflexible dogmas were unable to make themselves heard above the din of battle. They would have to wait.

But despite all the carnage, futility, and chaos attending the new poetry movement, it was not

without its positive side (here the war parallel breaks down), and one might justifiably hazard the assertion that the achievements of this movement far outweigh, though they certainly do not outnumber, the miscarriages. A New America needed new interpreters--young, honest, free-born spirits, in love with life in all its chameleon moods and guises, eager to sing themselves and their America. Because they answered this call, and incidentally in so doing left their unmistakable impress upon the face of American letters, we are in their debt.

Let us open the examination of this eventful four-year period with a brief survey of the insurgent critical attitude toward poetry as an art, followed by a consideration of the traditionalist viewpoint.

One of the characteristics of the "new" criticism, well worth noting, was its conception of the meaning of poetry. When the question "What is Poetry?" was being repeatedly asked in the late eighties and nineties, the usual reply ran something like this: "Poetry is the concrete and artistic metrical expression in figurative language of conceptions of the inspired human mind by its creative faculties."¹ Thus C.H. Luders soberly defined poetry in 1888. Carl Sandburg, thirty-four years later, gave the Muse more latitude. He tells

¹American Magazine, XVI, 105.

us that "poetry is an echo asking a shadow dancer to be a partner...a mock of a cry at finding a million dollars and a mock of a laugh at losing it...the achievement of the synthesis of hyacinths and biscuits."²

Maxwell Bodenheim protested against poetry's being made to play the role of chambermaid to burning messages and noble ideas. Poetry had been too long "a delicate dancer chained by the undying desire of men to instruct each other."³

"A poem," said Edgar Lee Masters, "comes out of the vibrations of the soul--the rhythmical vibration of the soul. For all vibration is rhythmical. And this is the vibration which by its dynamic comes up into words, and effects subtle and inherent cadence, even where no definite rhythm is attempted."⁴

The following definition by Max Eastman probably represents more fully than any of the rest the position of those in sympathy with the "modern" tendencies. "Poetry is the art of the living name, and it flourishes in profanity and vituperation as truly and luxuriantly as in the sublimest ranges of the spirit's aspiration. It is the art of staying awake all the time, of preserving, throughout the ravaging humdrum of business and

² Atlantic Monthly, CXXXI, 342-3.

³ New Republic, XIII, 212.

⁴ Poetry, VI, 308.

custom and decorum, a spirit fresh and all alive to the world."⁵

In other words, the emphasis was away from mechanics and form to substance and spirit. The poetic was coming to be sensed as fundamentally a mood rather than as a manner. Broader definitions and a posteriori rationalizations were found necessary, as well as convenient, to house those "borderline" pieces which orthodox poetic canons could not conscientiously accomodate.

If the new poets were wont to stress content at the expense of form, the reason is obvious: the preceding generation of sweet singers had gone to the other extreme. "They had," one writer charged, "betrayed life into the hands of a brutal, unredeeming waste; they betrayed poetry itself into the hands of a vain, sterile ideal."⁶ The new generation was now pleading the case of poetry in a new court and presenting in a convincing way, fresh evidence in its behalf. Any deficiencies in symmetry and polish were more than offset by a spontaneous overflow of intensity and sincerity. They plumbed deeper, and ranged more widely. Whether it was a belching monster of steel, a fog "on silent haunches," or New England lilacs or birches mattered not; all was grist that came to their mills. They but reserved the right

⁵ The New Republic, IX, 184.

⁶ The Forum, LIII, 759.

to stamp this material with the seals of their own personalities.

Although the utilizing of new themes and the viewing of old themes from new angles differentiated, most sharply and most vitally, the new poetry from the old, it was over questions of form that the battle raged most fiercely. Literary patterns, like blank verse and sonnets, take on, in time, value in themselves. They come to have a fitness and an allure of their own, and woe unto the iconoclastic ones who think they can profitably dispense with these hallowed molds. Fresh impulses and fresh themes call for correspondingly fresh methods of treatment, replied the insurgents. Poetry, better approached as an organic entity, is now laid on the operating table, and what might have been a harmonious, salutary clinic degenerated into an acrid controversy over points of secondary importance.

The revolt, on its negative side, was a spirited protest against external standards. Critics, unsympathetic or openly hostile, were accused of failing to see the direction in which American poetry was moving. The English language in America was becoming something noticeably if not radically different from the English language in England. A new diction, a new idiom, simple,

direct, athletic, was displacing older, more dignified and rhetorical language habits, and was giving appropriate, if not always satisfactory or beautiful, expression to the complex American scene. "People had come to think," said A.D. Ficke, "that regular rhythms, rhymes, and a good deal of talk about 'azure argosies' and 'hill-sides vernal' and 'argent panoplies' and 'light supernal' constituted the badge of the modern poet; and that fine poetry had really died with Queen Victoria."⁷

Having been challenged, the new critics proved more than able to take care of themselves in close hand-to-hand fighting. What with the Poetry group, Amy Lowell, Ezra Pound, W.S. Braithwaite, Louis Untermeyer, the Imagist school (which will be treated separately), and a horde of others, the "new poetry" movement was certainly not wanting for interpreters and leaders.

Amy Lowell was indefatigable in her efforts to rationalize the freer tendencies, to English imported verse forms, and to throw a mantle of hoary respectability over many innovations mistakenly thought of as "new."⁸ Louis Untermeyer was loosing polemics against the universities, which he accused of exerting a baleful influence upon the poetic impulse. Ezra Pound

⁷ North American Review, CCIV, 446.

⁸ The Dial, LXIV, 145-7.

appealed in strident terms for an artistic aristocracy, and the development of a criticism of poetry, cosmopolitan and catholic. Odell Shepard pleaded for poetry criticism "at once sympathetic and rigorous, at once hospitable and sound. Granted", he said, "that criticism of one's contemporaries is most difficult and hazardous, it is far from impossible. It provides, indeed, as Sainte-Beuve saw, the supreme test of any critical theory, of any critical powers. More than this, it has the great advantage over any criticism of the past, that it may make poetry available to the very generation out of which it has grown and to which it is primarily addressed."⁹ W.S. Braithwaite warned critics to remember when considering American poetry that it should be studied as American Poetry. Mr. Braithwaite, whom W.D. Howells called "the most intelligent historian of contemporary poetry we can think of," believed that the year 1916 was the pivot upon which American poetry would either recede or advance, and that without "creative criticism" it was doomed to retrogression.¹⁰ H.S. Canby, speaking for the consumer, said: "I honestly believe that it is better to read fantastic poetry, coarse poetry, prosaic poetry--anything but vulgar and sentimental poetry--than no poetry at all. To be susceptible

⁹ Poetry, V, 227-33.

¹⁰ The Bookman, XLV, 280.

to no revival of the vivid emotions of youth, to be touched by no thoughts more intense than our own, to be accessible to no imaginative interpretation of the life we lead--this seems to me a heavy misfortune."¹¹ And Miss Monroe's attitude toward the producer of verse is representative: "We have printed not only odes and sonnets, blank verse dramas and rhymed pentameter narratives, but imagistic songs, futuristic fugues, fantasies in vers libre, rhapsodies in polyphonic prose--any dash for freedom which seemed to have life and hope in it."¹²

However grievous and unpardonable its sins were or appeared to be, that the "new poetry" revolt brought life, color, and movement to a moribund art, a more zealous and courageous approach to contemporary reality, and a healthy impatience with cramping formalism, cannot be denied. And now, taking its virtues for granted, let us see what those more or less at variance with the new tendencies were saying about it.

Naturally, the charge most often brought against it, and the one most vigorously pressed, was the contention that free verse and its ilk were not poetry. Such effusions are not poetry--they are merely shredded prose, badly mangled according to individual caprice.

¹¹ Harper's Monthly, CXXXII, 296.

¹² Poetry, VI, 83.

There was serious doubt in the minds of many whether the arbitrary division of lines had anything at all to do with rhythm, Amy Lowell to the contrary.

John Livingston Lowes touched a sore spot in pointing out that the peril of free verse lay in the tendency to obliterate the ancient landmarks between freedom and license. "Furthermore," he added, "even at its best, in electing this peculiar freedom of its own, vers libre has at the same time made certain definite renunciations. For by substituting rhythm alone for the fusion of rhythm and meter, it has foregone the great harmonic, orchestral effects of the older verse."¹³

The critic who said: "I cannot believe that free verse is to become a permanent literary form. It is in my view a hybrid on whose sterility we may pretty certainly reckon,"¹⁴ came to a conclusion to which scores of others had likewise come.

The "new poetry" movement was said, also, to have fallen a victim to one of the diseases which it had resolutely set out to exterminate, namely, dogmatism. Avoidance of a creed had become a creed, freedom a cult. In emphasizing the timely, they neglected the timeless. Any thing old was discounted in direct ratio to its conventionality. "In this large and broad field of

¹³

Convention and Revolt in Poetry, p.266.

¹⁴

The Dial, LXI, 94.

pleasures," said L. C. Harolf,¹⁵ "how puny and dwarf-like appear our 'new poetry' pipers of one note! And the little private gardens they have staked out, in all the wide expanse, where but so many flowers of joy are permitted to vegetate, - are they in accord with the all-inclusive spirit of poetic art?"

Was the "new poetry" movement wasting its strength and talent squabbling over superficialities? Was it interpreting fully or truly the New America? Did the poets of the day fail to touch the heart? Had "externality," as opposed to the sterile "internality" of the nineties, become an obsession with the modern poet? Many were inclined to believe that the movement was guilty of all of these counts.

R. M. Gay¹⁶ divided the new poets into two classes: those who were trying to be recondite, and those who were trying to be virile; while Conrad Aiken,¹⁷ excepting Frost, Robinson, and perhaps Masters, divided the bulk of contemporary American verse into two types: the confectioners - "the prettifiers, the brighteners of life," who were in the majority; and the caviar type, like William Carlos Williams, who went to the other extreme in the matter of individuality.

¹⁵The Dial, LIX, 207.

¹⁶Atlantic Monthly, CXVIII, 98-103.

¹⁷The Dial, LXIII, 513-5.

Walter Lippmann,¹⁸ apparently suffering less from disillusionment in 1916 than in 1928, made much fun of Miss Lowell's "externality," protesting that he did not know what it means to be interested in "things for themselves," "I grant Miss Lowell," he concluded, "that there are colors in the dustheaps, but what I'm afraid of is that her horror of noble thoughts has frightened her away from the effort of finding color and significance in those more difficult objects about which human life revolves."

A writer in the New York Sun was less specific: "Poetry is today a matter of pure impressionism. Mood breeds mood, feeling breeds feeling, and our little poems are rounded with a quarrel. It is the decadence of an age. Find the word, find the nuance, find the image. The theme is of no consequence."¹⁹

The magazines during this period were filled with articles and malicious parodies, ridiculing and burlesquing the contortionists and faddists for whom a little liberty had been a disastrous thing. The English language was taken on one slumming expedition after another. Too long have we been staggering under the heavy burdens imposed by the grammarians - down with

¹⁸New Republic, VI, 158-9.

¹⁹Literary Digest, LIX, 31

rules and the accepted customs of usage, shrieked the "vers libertines." Verbs, conjunctions, articles, were lightly dispensed with, and rational beings wondered if nouns would follow them into the discard.

Ebullitions of this nature had become so common and annoying that The Review of Reviews, in order to protect its readers from deception, promised to state in its notices of new books of verse whether these volumes contained the conventional forms or the "new free verse."²⁰ Even the editors of Poetry roundly lampooned the "I - am - it" school of poetry, as exemplified at its egoistic best, in Others, an anthology.²¹

Before passing on to Imagism, let us examine a bit of criticism directed at the "new poetry" on its more representative levels. W. M. Patterson displayed rare critical insight tempered with sympathetic understanding, I think, when he said: "Your generation is proving its gift of fire. On the other hand, they say in France that you lack 'technique' and 'concentration.' Isn't this partly true? Perhaps, then, you will be among the first to realize that you should feel your genres a little more distinctly, and having felt them help the rest of us, as the musical composer helps us, and as Miss Lowell in

²⁰Review of Reviews, LIV, 233.

²¹Poetry, VIII, 103-5.

in several instances has helped us, by employing a clearer notation, such as long lines for spaced prose and shorter lines for unitary verse, or any other device that will keep us straight as to our rhythmical whereabouts when we read you."²²

Quite different in tone, though perhaps more typical of the general critical attitude of the irresconcilables, was the position taken by R. Cutter. To his way of thinking the "new poetry" was only a "beneficial revulsion," a vigorous purgative, and no more attractive than any other kind of cathartic. "The old bottles," he declaimed, "were filled with sour dregs and cobweb mustiness, unfit receptacles for new sparkling wine; we were intellectually dyspeptic. God prescribed Miss Lowell. To Calliope and Erato he recommended unsugared and nasty doses; and now, safe in the Ark, a few farsighted critics are waiting till a new Ararat rears its crest above the muddy flood."²³

And so on, back and forth, until near the close of the second decade of the twentieth century.

²²North American Review, CCVII, 265-6.

²³The Nation, CIV, 141.

II

The cardinal tenets of the Imagist faith were six in number: (1) the employment of the exact word, (2) the creation of new rhythms, (3) the right to absolute freedom in the choice of subject matter, (4) the presentation of images, (5) the production of poetry that is hard and clear, and (6) the belief in concentration as being the true essence of poetry.²⁴

A very admirable creed, as creeds go, which went back to the traditional past for its justification in living experience and actual, though unheralded, poetic practice. All of the fundamental principles embodied in the Imagist platform--whatever the terminology employed from time to time--had been used to good effect by earlier poets, for the most part unconsciously. The Imagists, on the other hand, adopted those principles quite consciously, and remembering that they were poets, followed them quite religiously, so in contrast to their predecessors who usually relied solely upon conscience, good sense, and the artistic urge (when present) to secure whatever objective or objectives he may have happened to have in view.

A certain amount of obscurity surrounds the origin of Imagism considered as a composite credo rather

²⁴Louis Untermeyer, Modern American Poetry, (1925), pp. 19-20.

than as a practicing school. Padraic Colum testifies that of the Imagist platform in the November, 1894, number of The Contemporary Review, saying it all then, declared Mr. Colum, much better than others have done since in their several fitful ways. But considering Imagism as an active ferment in the "new poetry" movement, I believe we can join Louis Untermeyer²⁶ in crediting Ezra Pound with the bringing of "the insurgents into a definite group."

After publishing Des Imagistes in 1914, Pound deserted the group, and a little later Amy Lowell assumed leadership. The most prominent members of this school during the years 1915-17 were D.H. Lawrence, Richard Aldington, and F.S. Flint in England, and H.D., Amy Lowell, and John Gould Fletcher in America.

In September, 1914, Ezra Pound²⁷ expounded at great length upon different "isms" such as Vorticism, Symbolism, and Imagism. "The tenets of the Imagiste faith," stated Mr. Pound, "were published in March, 1913, as follows: '(1) Direct treatment of the "thing", whether subjective or objective. (2) To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation. (3) As regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of the metronome."

According to Mr. Pound, the Symbolists "dealt

²⁶Modern American Poetry (1925), p. 19.

²⁷ Fortnightly Review, c 11, 461-71.

According to Mr. Pound, the Symbolists "dealt in Association", that is in a sort of allusion, almost of allegory," degrading the symbol to the status of the word. Their symbols had a fixed value like arithmetical numbers. The Imagists, on the other hand, presented the image (old as the lyric but long unnamed) which has a variable algebraic significance, and is "the furthest possible remove from rhetoric," Dante is a great poet, said Mr. Pound, because he had the faculty of presenting images, and Milton is a wind-bag because he lacked this faculty. The raison d'être of the Imagism of 1912-14 as a critical movement was to bring poetry up to the level of prose. "No one is so quixotic as to believe that contemporary poetry holds any such position," added Mr. Pound.

In America, during the years of 1915 and 1916 especially, Imagism was much fought over, and although a gratifying amount of pertinent and astute criticism emanated from the camps of both the defenders and the attackers, critical estimates marked by serenity and openmindedness were seldom encountered.

Judged from the quantity of counter-criticism he was obliged to parry, Conrad Aiken was the most damaging unbeliever the Imagists had to contend with. By the middle of 1915, Mr. Aiken felt that the time had come

to put this particular poetry sect in its proper place, because as things were going he feared that they might do harm to themselves as well as to other poets.

Accordingly, Mr. Aiken²⁸ brought an impressive number of rather serious charges against them. For one thing, they had become too pretentious; Richard Aldington was lauding the work of his wife in The Little Review, and John Gould Fletcher was singing Miss Lowell's praises in Poetry. In other words, the group was deteriorating into a sort of mutual admiration society; and so far as Mr. Aiken could see there was little reason why they should take themselves, or be taken by others, so seriously. They were working but a very thin vein, and, excepting Mr. Fletcher's work, he discovered but slight traces of feeling for movement or balance among them. Instead of welcoming self-imposed artistic restrictions, they waged relentless warfare on any and all regular forms. In closing, he does give them credit for one thing: exploring that psychological world of "the semi-precious in experience."

Aiken, in replying to Mr. Braithwaite, who had found much beauty and depth of feeling in Imagism, and who had accused Aiken of putting Imagism in a false light, stated that the followers of the Imagists were all too likely to mistake bird cages for cathedrals. Unlike

²⁸ New Republic, 111, 75-6.

Mr. Braithwaite,²⁹ he found but slight emotional power in Imagist verse, pointing out that the worth of a poem "must be measured not only by the paroxysm form which it may have sprung but from its own power to arouse feeling."³⁰

O.W. Firkins³¹ traced three great revolts in English prosody--the revolt against parity of line-lengths of the Middle Ages, the revolt against rhyme antedating Elizabeth, and the revolt against parity of feet which is not much older than the last century-- and detected in Imagism the "culmination and combination" of all three. He found imagistic verse suffering from overdetachment and passivity. It lacked direction, story, climax, and "the basis of defined expectation." "Where all expectation is vague," he said, "all unexpectedness is vapid."

Other critics of this group of poets were more sympathetic. L.W. Smith believed that Imagism, considered as a cult, was freakish and sterile, but that it was, nevertheless, "indicative of some new romantic impulses which will be ultimately fruitful in the way of a fuller and more vital poetry."³²

Miss Monroe, who, as a rule, is never equivocal or half-hearted on any question, was expansively laudatory. "This is a cosmopolitan age," she declared, "in spite of separative and mediaeval wars. Imagism is perhaps, in the last analysis, the beginning of a search for the

²⁹ New Republic, 111, 154-5.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 205.

³¹ The Nation, cl, 458-9.

³² Atlantic Monthly, CXVII, 492.

Chinese magic, and this search will probably go on as we dig deeper into that long-hidden, far-away mine of jewels, in spite of Mr. Aiken and other belated and provincial Victorians. More than half a century has passed since Occidental painting and sculpture began to feel the subtly regenerative influence of Oriental art. The great art of poetry has been shut in more than these by narrow boundaries of race and language; but like these it must come out in the open, lift its voice over the seas, and spread its wings to the winds of the world."³³

Two years later Padraic Colum gave terser expression to the same idea. He thought that perhaps the Imagists would turn out to be the germinal forerunners of a distinctive American poetic literature, explaining that the future American poet might be the child of a Swede or a Russian who would not feel the traditional English verse rhythms and would probably stumble if he tried to use them.³⁴

But after 1916 interest in Imagism rapidly subsided. Its public contributions having been made, the surviving members of the group returned to "private life." "They had," as Mr Untermeyer says, "helped to swell the tide of realistic and romantic naturalism--a tide of which their contribution was merely one wave, a high breaker that carried its impact far into shore."³⁵

³³ Poetry, VI, 305.

³⁴ The Dial, LXII, 127.

³⁵ Modern American Poetry (1925), p. 21.

Today the prevailing opinion seems to be that the Imagists failed. Allen Tate attributes their failure to the fact that they did not seem to realize that language is something more than a matter of vocabulary. "Imagism," says Mr. Tate, "as it was set forth in the official dogma, contained its own contradiction. It held out for the fresh visualization of objects--that is to say, for the creation of metaphor--but it ignored the total vision, the imagination, by means of which the raw perceptions are bound together into a whole. The Imagists' poetry lacked meaning: though some of their work, the early poems, for example, of Mr. John Gould Fletcher, achieved a kind of success with the merely pictorial and decorative possibilities of the image."³⁶

Mr. Untermeyer, in his American Poetry Since 1900,³⁷ summed up the case against them as follows: "The chief trouble with the Imagists was not their attitude toward literature but toward life. In the main their work concerned itself little with 'the language of common speech', they produced a plethora of poetry that was anything but 'hard and clear', their belief that 'concentration is the very essence of poetry' did not prevent them from being false to their faith. They

³⁶New Republic, LIV, 165.

³⁷pp. 306-7.

assumed as an essential the questionable desirability of cosmopolitanism in art; they were continually falling in love with a new 'influence'. One heard, beneath the jargon of independence and their opposition to contemporary forms, a strange jargon of foreign cultures, a dependence on French or Japanese standards and a manifest allegiance to other rules."

Admitting their failure, it is still possible, we believe, to grant the justice of the following encomium paid to them by Mr. Untermeyer in 1925: "They were," he acknowledged, "for all their preciosity and occasion - extravagances, prophets of freedom--literature in the sense that their programs, pronouncements, and propaganda compelled even their most dogged adversaries to acknowledge the integrity of their aims. Their re-statement of old truths was one of the things which helped the new poetry out of a bog of rhetorical rubbish."³⁸

³⁸ Modern American Poetry (1925), p. 19.

III

That indefatigable anthologist, W. S. Braithwaite, declared in 1917³⁹ that Edwin Arlington Robinson stood at the head of our poets. Today, Mr. Robinson's position in the American literary world is indeed enviable. Three times has he been awarded the more or less coveted Pulitzer poetry prize, and Tristram, which brought this honor to its author for the third time, was not only a "best-seller" but has been enthusiastically hailed in our best critical circles as an American classic. Although Mr. Robinson is generally conceded to be one of our finest poets (many distinguished critics placing him first among his contemporaries), still, even today, the feeling will not altogether down that his poetry lacks warmth, rapture, and color.

O. W. Firkins said of The Man Against the Sky when it appeared in 1916: "He gives me feeling and music, and I could fare well enough on this generous ration, if my host's own dissatisfaction were not so evident. He wants more and he stirs in me impatiences and hankerings which might well have been lulled by the sedative of his music. I am offered a languid narrative, an attenuated drama--above all, a famished intellectualism!"⁴⁰

³⁹The Bookman, XLV, 430.

⁴⁰The Nation, CIII, 151.

Edward Garnett, writing on American poets a year later in the Atlantic Monthly, had the following to say of the above named book: "His thought and imagery fall into over-symmetrical patterns, and that the attention is fatigued thereby, almost as if, indeed, one had been gazing through a kaleidoscope. Has not Mr. Robinson's polished manner stiffened unconsciously into a mannerism that binds too inflexibly his emotion and thought?"⁴¹

Odell Shepard⁴² found Mr. Robinson's Merlin and Mr. Ficke's An April Elegy to possess one fault in common: they both led the reader to expect narrative, and both disappointed that expectation. Although he discovers a great deal of brilliancy and piercing insight in the two volumes, in Merlin he finds the story blurred, halting and dull, in the other, trivial and hackneyed.

Again Mr. Firkins (with whom we are by no means through), found Merlin redolent of power, yet not powerful. "...Mr. Robinson has sought to add picturesque and dramatic intellectuality to the great mediaeval story....With the picturesqueness Mr. Robinson has succeeded; with the drama he has not failed, but

⁴¹
Atlantic Monthly, CXX, 372.

⁴²
The Dial, LXIII, 339-41

the intellectuality is only a streamer or a banderole. Thought has not visited this poem; like Old Age in holmes's allegory, it has only left its card."⁴³

Robert Frost was not always received with open arms by the critics either when his poems were making their early appearances. Mr. Firkins, in reviewing A Boy's Will, said: "The real value of these poems lies in the quality of their emotion. Their tone is sombre, but it is that youthful sombreness which is little more than a play of hide-and-seek with cheerfulness. The definition of the feeling is not always sharp, but, even in its vagueness, it exhibits a savor, a saltiness, a searching and penetrating quality, which augurs well for this young writer's future. I regret that Mr. Frost should think it desirable to exhibit in many places a crabbed syntax and a jolting metre. I am not consoled for these asperities by the probability that they are intentional, for I do not subscribe to the theory that in our day, when the muses are lethargic, they must be jostled before they can be made to dance."⁴⁴

C.A.P. Comer⁴⁵ was much more severe. In her opinion Frost was too stark, austere, and detached, and his characters, though actual, came no closer to attaining human dignity than did the lichens on his birch trees.

⁴³ The Nation, CVII, 98.

⁴⁴ The Nation, CI, 228.

⁴⁵ Atlantic Monthly, CXVII, 493-8.

"Reading North of Boston," she said, "one suddenly asks one's self if Mrs. Wharton knows that she too is a poet? For if these are poems--and one willingly admits that they are poems of a high order--then Ethan Frome is also a poem of identically the same school."

W.A. Bradley heartily admired the magic, sensuousness, and genuine feeling for nature so delightfully present in Mr. Frost's poems, but considered as a dramatic and narrative poet, found him "often unnecessarily cryptic and involved."⁴⁶

If we are to believe the Boston Transcript, Frost "accomplished what no other American poet of this generation has accomplished, and that is, unheralded, un-introduced, untrumpeted, he has won the acceptance of an English publisher on his own terms, and the unqualified approbation of a voluntary English criticism."⁴⁷

The critic on the New York Globe insisted on Frost's essential Americanism: "It is truly American, at least truly New England, from blueberries and stone-wall and pasture to the woodpile and the hired man. And yet England seems to have recognized this American poet first. It is curious. It is as if Masfield should first have been read in this country."⁴⁸

⁴⁶The Dial, LXI, 530.

⁴⁷Current Opinion, LVIII, 427-8.

⁴⁸Ibid.

While it was an English public that first welcomed Mr. Frost's poetry, and an English publisher who first printed it, we must give America credit for losing precious little time in taking him to her bosom. Mr. Braithwaite was speaking the truth when he declared in 1917 that "Mr. Frost came into his own so quickly with his home public that scarcely any poet of our generation, not even Mr. Masters, defined his material and treatment so clearly and impressively upon readers." Of Mountain Interval he said: "It combines the lyrical treatment of A Boy's Will and the narrative treatment of North of Boston, though lacking the unity of both the earlier volumes in conception and interest."⁴⁹

That distinguished pioneer champion of the new spirit in American poetry, Amy Lowell--brilliant, unflagging, and versatile to the end--had her ups and downs in the critical world, too.

A reading of Sword Blades and Poppy Seed brought the following response from A.D. Ficke: "...Unrhymed cadence at its best can hardly convey that intensity of effect which is poetry's peculiar function; certain clear emotional heights are as impossible of attainment by it as by prose....Not so pliant, not so accurate, not even so free a medium for expression as the old rhythms.

To say a thing directly--to cry it out, is not necessarily to express it. The complexities of rhythm and rhyme are not always a hindrance to the expression of complex thoughts."⁵⁰

While giving Miss Lowell full credit for two virtues: a sensitiveness to "things," and "the lustihood and sparkle of her narrative," O.W. Firkins remarked that her success with French metres testified more to her skill than to their value. Her expansiveness and lack of humanity were also disappointing to him.⁵¹

In the case of Edward Garnett, the scales were tipped in Miss Lowell's favor. "Lowell," said Mr. Garnett, "supplies American poetry with sensuous imagery and emotional zest, which it has sadly lacked for a decade. Brilliant is the term for Men, Women and Ghosts--praise which holds good when the book is put to the test of a third reading."⁵²

To W.A. Bradley's way of thinking, Sword Blades and Poppy Seed was far superior to Men, Women and Ghosts, "with the possible exception of Patterne"--a perfect thing in its way". Mr. Bradley feared that Miss Lowell was writing too much and too rapidly. She was sacrificing beauty in straining after alien effects; ex-

⁵⁰ The Dial, LVIII, 12.

⁵¹ The Nation, C, 139-40.

⁵² Atlantic Monthly, CXX, 370.

perimentation was becoming an obsession with the result that means were being stressed at the expense of ends.⁵³

William Dean Howells believed that Amy Lowell was at her best when she used rhyme and metre. "We have not forgotten The Black Riders of Stephen Crane, very powerful things in the beat of their short lines, rhymeless, meterless. Yet were they quite shredded prose, like Miss Amy Lowell's vers libre, in her Sword Blades and Poppy Seed, or the epitaphs of Mr. Edgar Lee Masters' Spoon River Anthology? Not quite, however, for though The Black Riders did not prance or curvet, they did somehow march; they did keep time as prose never does at its best."⁵⁴

Probably no volume of poetry to come out of the "new poetry" movement raised such a storm as did Spoon River Anthology, and probably no volume of poetry produced during that turbulent period will attain to longer life. If, as so many contend, Edwin Arlington Robinson is without a peer among contemporary American poets, Spoon River is, perhaps, without a peer among twentieth century books of poetry. It was villified, grudgingly accepted, and ecstatically welcomed on its appearance in 1915.

⁵³ The Dial, LXI, 529.

⁵⁴ Harper's Monthly, CXXXI, 634.

R.M. Alden called it "the reductio ad absurdum of certain of the new methods,--such as the abandonment of conventional form and the fearless scrutiny of disagreeable realities. There is nothing here, to be sure," he said, "of the vaporings of some of our imagists, but a stern virility to which one might warm were it not so deliberately unlovely...Mr. Masters has shown before this that he knows what verse is; how then can he perpetrate, and endure to see in type, trash like this?"⁵⁵

"The author of a Spoon River Anthology in presenting his marvellous human exhibit," said C.A.P. Comer, "uses a device which permits the reader to escape the agony of witnessing helpless suffering which is experienced so often in North of Boston. Spoon River Folk, a whole community of Southern Illinois, rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief, speak to us from the peace of their graves. The fever is forever past, the agony a bygone matter. There remains a dry wisdom, a deep perception of the crucial thing in each life's little day. This is recounted with an almost miraculous concision and definiteness. A whole personality goes into the hearts of men. Certain of the poems add to this imagination, tenderness, and beauty of an unusual order."⁵⁶

⁵⁵The Dial, LIX, 28.

⁵⁶Atlantic Monthly, CXVII, 496.

O.W. Firkins declared that Mr. Masters was obsessed by sex--and elementary sex at that. "Add to sex," said Mr. Firkins, "with its deceivings and undeceivings a disdain of mankind mollified by a few friendships of which that disdain is a prime cement, and you have the platform on which Mr. Masters bestows himself to philosophize the checkered and evasive world...In Spoon River, whatever its defects, he knew his way; aiming low in that work, he aimed straight, but in Songs and Satires he swerves and lapses, he is inconsistent to his path, to his tone, to his metaphor." "In it," said Mr. Firkins, "he betrays an emotional and intellectual poverty. Even in Spoon River, in its picture of the world as a lazar-house, the simplifications of life at large and the human problem were enormous.."57

Mr. Alden, returning to what apparently must have been a rather distasteful subject, found Songs and Satires more disappointing but seemingly a bit less irritating than Spoon River. He declared the dominant mood of Masters to be a composite of the dominant moods of Swift, Whitman, and Shaw. But unlike these writers, Mr. Masters has no style. "By style," explained Mr. Alden, "I mean a consistent medium of expression used with a sense of form, either prosaic or poetic...With

57 The Nation, CIV, 157

this in mind I am tempted to find in a certain elegant simile of Mr. Masters a description of many of his own effects: 'You are a Packard engine in a Ford'. For there is no denying him some of the admirable qualities which I attribute (wholly by hearsay) to a Packard engine. On the other hand, I should not think of applying to him the neighboring metaphor from the same poem: 'A barrel of slop that shines on Lethe's wharf.'⁵⁸

W.A. Bradley⁵⁹ came to the conclusion in 1916 (anent The Great Valley) that Masters was primarily a moralist, a social philosopher, and that only the mechanical restrictions of Spoon River held his discursive predilections in check. But with this restraint removed, the preacher "who has read Bob Ingersoll, Darwin, Gobineau, Grote,--a whole shelf-full of the World's Best Literature"--steps forth.

And the appearance of Toward the Gulf in 1918 unmistakably revealed the pathologist, eugenist, botanist, and anthropologist in Edgar Lee Masters, in the opinion of Jessie B. Rittenhouse.⁶⁰ Poetic beauty had been sacrificed upon the altar of ruthless intellectualism. Mr. Firkins also deplored the absence of beauty and the resulting atmosphere of dinginess which pervaded the

⁵⁸The Dial, LXI, 64.

⁵⁹The Dial, LXI, 528.

⁶⁰The Bookman, XLVII, 201.

poems in this volume. He resolutely maintained that the verses were backstairs gossip "even where their nominal housing is princely. The very brotherhood which is their redeeming trait is a fellowship in squalor... His work abounds in what our fearless ancestors would have called lewdness."⁶¹

Carl Sandburg, it seems, failed to take very seriously the Dial critic who had suggested a return to the brickyards on Mr. Sandburg's part. After reading what different critics have had to say about a few of our leading contemporary poets, Mr. Masters in particular, one might very logically conclude that perhaps it is all for the best that poets, reputedly sensitive in many respects, immediately become pachydermatous when in presence of their judges. When, and if, Carl Sandburg happened on to the following from the unflinching pen of U. W. Firkins, he no doubt offered up thanks for the many rough and tumble experiences which had helped to inure him to such things.

"The man in the man," said Mr. Firking, "must be clearly visible before his immersion in the mud can be either tragic or pathetic. Too often--not always-- in Mr. Sandburg's pictures the man is so often like the

⁶¹The Nation, CVI., 483-9.

and that his submergence produces no effect of tragic incongruity. These poems, which are all in free verse or shackled prose, show a rude power here and there, a power rather forsenic or journalistic than strictly poetical." His "error and calamity," said Mr. Perkins, "is the refusal of discipline... How can Mr. Sandburg, who values Chicago because Chicago tells and strives, when a choice is offered between the lax and the tense in metre, in description, in logic, content himself with the spineless preference for the easy and supine superlative? His style, he tells us, is his own, like his face. I concede the analogy. His face, if the interesting photograph supplied to me by the forethought of his publishers be veracious, is not left in a state of nature. I suggest a razor for his style."⁶²

To many of Sandburg's critics, his Chicago Poems were "brutal, coarse, revolting." W. A. Bradley was pained by Sandburg's brutality and affected violence of expression, but where Amy Lowell and others saw but one Sandburg, Mr. Bradley detected two: "...one the rather gross, simple-minded, sentimental, sensual man among men, going with scarcely qualified gusto through the grimy business of modern life which mystical mobocrat,

⁶²The Nation, CIII, 152.

he at once assails and glorifies; the other, the highly sensitized impressionist who finds in the subtle accords between his own ideal moods and loveliest most elusive aspects of the external world, material for delicate and dream-like expression."⁶³

Vachel Lindsay, considered in many critical quarters today, especially in England, as the most representatively American of all living American poets, was dealt with quite sympathetically during this unsettled period.

In 1915, William Dean Howells, whose attitude through the years toward the "new poetry" movement is deserving of a separate study, found in the poetry of Lindsay "the old novelty of beautiful thought and thinking emotion."⁶⁴

Jessie B. Rittenhouse saw Lindsay as a non-conformist, approaching life from his own angle and expressing himself in his own way. And though much of his work is ephemeral and experimental, she said, much like The Congo and The Chinese Nightingale is lasting.

Lindsay fared unusually well at the hands of that harsh, never-tiring critic of "modern" poetry, O. W. Firkins: "When Mr. Lindsay begins to convoy

⁶³The Dial, LXI, 528-9.

⁶⁴Harper's Monthly, CXXXI, 636.

General Booth into Heaven to the accompaniment of banjos and bass drums, I go back to the Biglow Papers....But at this point I hesitate. Mr. Lindsay's corn is not mouldy; his babbaric orchestration recalls rather the seed corn in the mummy-case, a primitive growth, re-sprouting in a modern soil. Mr. Lindsay reaches one hand to David and another to Omar, gives Sidney Porter (O. Henry) the accolade with the sword that has just felled Ex-Senator Lorimer, and glorifies John P. Altgeld between a defense of Poe and a supplication to Shakespeare. Unbelievers might expect such poems to be anything-- or everything--but poetic; in point of fact they are more poetic than anything else. They are poetry...I could wish sometimes for more study and endeavor: I crave and miss those two or three perfect lines in each poem which would convert by the grace and lure which it possesses into absolute and authoritative charm."⁶⁵

⁶⁵The Nation, CIII, 151.

IV

Much might be said here of the many fine poems written by contemporary American poets which directly or by implication deal with the subject of the War, or reveal the War, as the motivating agent back of them. Much space might be given, also, to the recording of the apparent impetus which the War gave to the reading of poetry--and still, we would not have begun to exhaust the possibilities of a topic so susceptible of neverending ramification. But our sole purpose, however unambitious and unnecessary it may be, is but to reiterate very briefly what was earlier pointed out, namely, the relatively negligible effect which the World War had upon Modern American poetry.

The war most certainly did give a powerful impetus to the production of much of our present day literature of disillusionment. The barriers of reticence, weakened by numerous deadly pre-war assaults, did crash to earth following the close of the Great Upheaval. Indeed, what St. John Ervine foresaw as early as 1915 has largely come to pass: "Practically the world in which we were born," he said in that year, "came to an end at the beginning of last August, and a new world was created...We shall have to shed many beliefs and

acquire many new ones before we are able to move about in the comfort we had before the war began. The process of adjustment will be difficult and tortuous for all of us, but it will be a thousand times more tortuous for the novelist and the imaginative writer, who has not merely to fit himself into the new world, but has to discover the readjustment made in the lives of other people."⁶⁶

St. John Ervine was indeed a true seer, and after citing the above quotation it should not be necessary to ferret out specific instances or dwell at length upon tendencies with which we are so familiar, and which bear out so well the truth of his generalizations.

In contrast to Mr. Ervine in 1915, Frank Swinnerton in 1928 does not come off so well when he says: "We have had since the War a succession of experiments in forms, ranging from the weak little sketch masquerading as a Chekhovian short-story, and the irregularly chopped lengths of prose which saved our young poets the pains of rhyming and were called 'free-verse', to pure gibberish and the undigested catalogues

⁶⁶Current Opinion, LCIII, 427.

of sensations and sensitivenesses which have been described as great novels."⁶⁷

If Mr. Swinnerton had qualified "since the War his statement would carry greater conviction. It would be well for him (and he is by no means alone in falling into this error) to readjust his chronological sights. An examination of the barest historical outline of the developments and trends in either American or British poetry of the twentieth century should serve to set him right on several points.

To all readers and critics who show an disinclination to go to the records in this matter of the World War and its influence upon contemporary American poetry, Simeon Strunsky's short survey of American literature since 1900 is heartily recommended.⁶⁸

After pointing out that "it is the proper thing to say that the revolution in life and literature was brought about by the World War," Mr. Strunsky bluntly states that it is not so; and the evidence which he marshalls in support of this bluntness completely justifies it. The process of revolution was plainly discernible a dozen years before the outbreak of the War, he says, and "in full swing half a dozen years before the war came to

⁶⁷Saturday Review, IV, 422.

⁶⁸New York Times Magazine, Feb. 12, 1928, pp. 1, 2, 16, 17.

us in 1917." In his opinion American literature would have remained essentially what it is today even though the War had never come.

Concerning the "new poetry" movement in relation to the war, Mr. Strunsky had the following pertinent comment to make: "The war had been only a year under way in Europe, was still two years away from us, when Mr. Masters said the last word in disillusionment and revolt. Obviously he could not have been influenced in 1915 by the bankruptcy of a civilization that had still three years to function, or by the defeat of a great hope four years before the Treaty of Versailles. He could not have been thrown off his balance in 1915 by the wave of materialism which descended upon us in 1920, dancing hand in hand with the Eighteenth Amendment. Masters and Drwiser in 1915 were the product of forces that had been at work among us since the beginning of the century...Spoon River appeared only a year after North of Boston and Sword Blades and Poppy Seed, both of the latter in 1914. It would thus appear that at the beginning of the World War the new poetry of free verse and free speech had its full stature...By 1917, the literary historians inform us, the new poetry had conquered the country,

registering unprecedented sales, hailed as 'America's first national art'. The dates supply convincing evidence that Robert Frost and Amy Lowell, like Edgar Masters, were not impelled to cast off the shackles of rhyme and abandon the trappings of poesy by the stark realities with which the World War brought humanity face to face."

Mr. Strunsky was not, however, deaf to the War's reverberations: to him it was a training "in intensification and magnification." Furthermore, he very graciously conceived of the War as focusing popular attention upon "the established article in our new literature." In other words, the World War was not the "new poetry's" prime mover, but merely its "public relations counsel."

CHAPTER SIX

DEFLATION (1919-24)

By the end of 1918 America's "new poetry" movement had spent its force. But although the pioneer drive and energy of the revolt began to slacken perceptibly from 1919 on, experiment and daring innovation (all too often gargoylish and bizarre) by no means ceased. Rather, the spirit of rebellion and discontent, fostered and intensified by post-war disillusionment, was strikingly manifested in divers outbreaks of queer--almost pathologic-versifying.

Harriet Monroe¹ on the seventh anniversary of Poetry's founding (October, 1919), instead of reminiscing, turned her face to the future. Displaying the same old militant, adventurous manner, she pleaded stridently for tolerance toward, and appreciation of, the new. As for technique she suspected that more, rather than less, freedom of form was coming. To the frequently heard charge that free verse is dead, she hurled back a defiant "no."

But Miss Monroe, we presume--perhaps charitably--was speaking for later contingents of young converts to the "new poetry" who gave such radical twists

¹Poetry, XV, 33-8.

and turns to a poetic process which had evolved slowly from dimly perceived beginnings.

If but little first rate war poetry was produced in America during the course of the fighting, not much more can be said for the post-war flowering in 1919. A writer² in The Nation held that hacks and poetasters thrive on war, while the true Muse is ill at ease. He found most post-war poetry constrained and inarticulate. Another writer³ in the same magazine found the poets turning away from the peace. They responded to the war and acclaimed the armistice, "but now," the writer said, "we get from them notes of disappointment, disillusion, disgust." Charles H. Towne castigated those pacifist poets (Witter Bynner and Ridgley Torrence are singled out for damnation on this score) "who would lift neither voice nor finger for their country in her hour of need."⁴

But despite the fact that most of the poetry related to the War in its several phases was disappointing, war poetry was still the best seller of its class. Booksellers could not keep Kilmer's "Trees" in stock at all, according to A. J. Burr.⁵ And not only war

²The Nation, CVIII, 858.

³The Nation, CIX, 454.

⁴Bookman, XLIX, 621.

⁵The Bookman, L, 82.

poetry but other varieties as well were enjoying a widespread popularity in 1919 and immediately following. The "new poetry" bubble had been blown to such dangerous proportions that Arthur Guiterman⁶ saw fit to prick it with an ironic thrust at pontifical critics of poetry, czaristic editors of poetry magazines, cataloguing anthologists, and the numerous fads, schools, and inanities connected with the late poetry orgy. But a public, long distracted by more pressing matters, was, apparently, in a less censorious mood at that time.

Our leading newspapers were not only printing more poetry, but were giving much free advertising to the "new poetry" and its leading practitioners. Libraries and bookshops reported an unprecedented interest in verse. Poetry societies were besieged by would-be joiners, and were offering tempting prizes for distinguished poetry. Translations, revivals, and collected editions of old favorites were noted.⁷ So many books were being written on "how, where, why, and when to appreciate poetry," that C. M. Green began to feel like the centipede in the old verse. And as for the flood of anthologies, to

⁶The Bookman, L, 181-5.

⁷Literary Digest, LXXV, 33.

take them away "from the present poetry reading public," he said, "is like taking beer from the working man."⁸

The "new poetry" at last "belonged," It had won the favor and confidence of the public, and the critical attitude, on the whole, recognized its existence even when it withheld approval. For the last fifty years or so, as one writer put it, poetry had been obliged to live a more or less outlawed, looked-down-upon existence, but now, thanks to its powerful ally, the time-spirit, poetry had come into its own. Man had put a new value on such long neglected qualities as "largeness of temper, wisdom, tolerance, humor, patience, objectivity, the readiness to take a less personal view of affairs, to plough up the mind and reexamine the roots of accepted opinion."⁹ The spirit of realism with its emphasis upon the contemporaneous, which had had its beginnings in the Middle West, now became the literary tone and thought pattern of the country's literature. Masters, Anderson, Dreiser, Lewis, Cather, Sandburg, and Lindsay were setting the pace.

While the critics who represented older and more conservative attitudes were still cold when they were not openly hostile to the new fashions, the important point to bear in mind is that they were now overwhelmingly

⁸The Bookman, L, 634.

⁹The Nation, CVIII, 905.

outnumbered--they had, generally speaking, lost caste and influence with a public that craved criticism more in tune with the modern temper, criticism which was rich with the juices of the critic's personality.

Along about 1919 compliments for the "new poetry" began to pour in. An Atlantic contributor¹⁰ found "strength and sparkle" in the new wine that the young poets were pouring. W. P. Eaton had the following weak but nevertheless sensible and disarming explanation to give a bewildered public anxious to be told what it is that differentiates poetry from prose: "Only there is a faith within them (the poets) that they are not writing prose. Anyone who has written verse both in the older and newer forms can testify that while he may be in the dark as to the technical philosophy of his vers libre, there is no question of a fundamental difference of impulse."¹¹

Ludwig Lewisohn, one of the wisest and warmest disciples of the "new criticism," saw the hope of the "new poetry" "neither in a confusion between experience and expression, nor in mistaking a fresh convention for an unattainable freedom..."but in the modern capacity to strip both the objective world and the soul of myth and ritual, to feel the edge of things and approach the

¹⁰Atlantic Monthly, CXXIII, 864.

¹¹Atlantic Monthly, CXXIV, 491.

nakedness of thought."¹²

"As for what is contemporary--so rich and various and adventurous has been the poetry of the last two decades,--" said Walter De La Mare, "that to ignore it, to decry it, to refuse it one's best attention would be merely to quarrel with this merry month of May because not all its blossoms are likely to be immortelles."¹³

Now that the "new poetry" movement had triumphed over its sternest critics, a healthy reaction generated largely from within its own ranks followed.

Maxwell Anderson,¹⁴ sensing an old worn-out world--stripped of its romance, advised our poets to turn from their feverish preoccupation with externals to the contemplation and subsequent setting down of the spiritual midnight and the intellectual chaos which we face. The beauty-loving M. Bodenheim¹⁵ made a passionate plea for more sensuousness and imagination in our poetry. He tilted at our modern poets who spurned roses and sunsets and turned instead to steam cranes, chorus girls, and shoestring peddlars. R. M. Weaver, never very enthusiastic about the "new poetry" at any time, in reviewing thirty-

¹²The Nation, CXI, 42.

¹³Living Age, CCCI, 794.

¹⁴New Republic, XXVII, 113.

¹⁵North American Review, CCXIII, 554.

four volumes of verse,¹⁶ found barbarism, crudity, and aggressive egotism common to all. In another paper he accused modern poetry of being "largely motivated in madness."¹⁷

At the same time that the new poet's pre-occupation with certain kinds of raw material was being impugned, his mania for free verse and kindred once quite unconventional forms was also under fire. "For six years--from 1914-20, to be coldly statistical,--" said Louis Untermeyer,¹⁸ "vers libre was the fashion in these otherwise conservative states." Now (in 1922) he finds its stock on the decline, and after dismissing certain popular explanations (such as the charge that its supporters had betrayed it, or the declaration that a return to first principles inevitably follows a period of promiscuity), he kindly supplies the real reason: "even the boy likes to cut into wood rather than wax; the sculptor chooses stone instead of putty."

"William McFee,¹⁹ recalling the tendency of poets thirty or forty years ago to treat of things about which they knew nothing, and in a style completely out of harmony with the life and tempo of their age, graciously acquitted the younger poets of these charges, but he

¹⁶ The Bookman, LI, 455.

¹⁷ The Bookman, LII, 58.

¹⁸ The Nation, CXIV, 687.

¹⁹ The Bookman, LV, 612-3.

nevertheless felt that these latter day singers gave a far too little attention to the technical problems of their trade. Unbounded enthusiasm was not enough. And Robert Bridges, writing in the North American Review, listed four adverse results of rejecting the metrical systems: "(1) loss of carrying power, (2) self-consciousness, (3) sameness of line structure, and (4) loss in determination of subsidiary 'accent'."²⁰

By 1923 the "new poetry" had ceased to hold the spotlight position on America's literary stage. Public interest subsided appreciably, and the critics were wont to take it far less seriously. Amy Lowell²¹ divided the poets coming on about that time into two classes: the lyrists, like Elinor Wylie and Edna Millay, and the secessionists, who seemed to be more concerned with proclaiming theories about poetry than they were about making it. Miss Lowell was far from sanguine regarding the immediate future of poetry. There was a possibility, she thought, that the near future would bring a period of silence followed by another renaissance, or, the "present feminine mood" might perhaps lead directly to the next advance.

²⁰North American Review, CCXVI, 654.

²¹New Republic, XXXVII, 3.

²²Literary Digest, LXXVIII, 28.

Edgar Lee Masters saw fundamentalism, censorship, and prohibitions of all kinds as a deadly threat to the creative instinct, and feared that the poet would be swallowed up in the confusion and materialism which surrounded him. Edmund Wilson²³ sounded the same pessimistic note, declaring that "poetry has practically expired (since the modern world no longer inspires the emotions which are proper to poetry)." "That poetry is not read must be admitted," said Mr. Hill, "even by those who think it is." According to Mr. Hill, poetry was once "useful," but now this usefulness has largely gone out of it. The poet was advised to go to school to the great novelists and playwrights; "if the verse form is to survive importantly, it must satisfy the poetic craving in humanity with the fundamental in story, dialogue, and idea. In all these poetry is now weak."²⁴ Another writer bemoaned the new poetry's "lack of broad contact with humankind."²⁵ Still another recommended shorter hours for poets.²⁶

In 1924, the general non-partisan attitude toward "new poetry" movement was ably summed up by the writer in The Nation who said: "The truth seems to be that no mere fashion in literature has a great vitality for any length of time. Its themes, its conventions,

²³ Literary Digest, LXXIX, 31-2.

²⁴ New Republic, XXXVII, 11.

²⁵ The Outlook, CXXXIII, 609.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 61-2.

its tricks, once given up by the writers of the first rank, may indeed still be manipulated by hacks with tireless ingenuity, and may long continue to please readers of slowly descending levels of sophistication. But something of the original vitality has gone. Ingenuity has taken the place of fresh creation... The thing goes on by sheer momentum... The end of a literary fashion dwells in a dim limbo."²⁷

²⁷ The Nation, CXIX, 111.

Chapter Seven
THE AMERICAN POETRY SCENE TODAY
(1925-28)

I

The status of American poetry today, as seen by many of its critics, is anything but a cause for rejoicing. A large number of them blame the poets for the very noticeable decline in the production of noteworthy poetry. Some blame the public. Others blame neither the poet nor the public, but rather the age: given a people interested primarily in the material things of life; given an age which sets a high value on these external facts of existence; and, what is most important of all, given a country which makes the attainment of these ponderable objectives relatively easy--and poetry languishes. And there are still others who declare that our tragedy resides in the fact that we have grown up - that we know too much about everything to feel deeply about anything.

Agreeing, then, that something is wrong with our present day poetry, and further agreeing that not one but many factors entering both into the process of production and the process of reception must bear the responsibility, let us turn our attention to the

examination of a few of the more pertinent criticisms of American poetry taken as a body.

By 1925, although there was much free, and even more libertine verse being written and printed, the "new poetry" movement was dated. Once an active, life-giving ferment, it had in later years degenerated into an attitude. Now only the fever of its decadence remained.

Two years later an editorial in the Saturday Review painted a depressing picture.¹ It noted that poetry was becoming subjective again, tenuously subtle and distressingly egoistic. It was more esoteric, more facile, but less strong. Only a few years back poetry had been alive and kicking, a vital art grounded in experience; now it was fast being reduced to the level of an esthetic exercise, practiced by cliques and coteries. The writer attributed this sorry condition to the fact that poets were now writing for a precariously restricted audience--themselves. What was even more regrettable, they had taken to reviewing each other's poetry, a practice not only exasperating to readers but detrimental to the creation of first rate poetry and authentic poetry criticism. Poetry was being devitalized and rendered suspect by a nauseous excess of uncritical praise, un-

¹Saturday Review, III, 797.

deserved protection, and unwise pampering. It had become the "spoiled child of the arts."

With such poetry being produced under such conditions, there should be no cause for wonder at the growing popularity of outlines of everything under the sun, realistic fiction and drama, and the "new biography." Poetry was losing contact with a public that demands (in this third decade) meat and substance in its reading matter, clearly and simply presented.

Vachel Lindsay,² speaking for the poet, blamed the current slump in poetry on the schools and colleges of our land which prescribe poetry as something "to be done" like Latin and geometry. "There is no word in America more hated than the word 'poet'," he asserted. "This is because poems have been used to punish students in grammar and high school; and as they grow up, in college and university. Standard poems are rubbed in like salt from the day the poor youngsters can read at all. This will continue indefinitely unless all poetry is thrown out of the grammar schools, high schools, colleges and universities, and poetry becomes a volunteer game, as baseball and football are--something to be discovered out of study hours."

Lindsay also had nothing good to say for the "art-store panel of the portraits of dead poets" or for

²Saturday Evening Post, CXCIX, 13, 43 (Nov. 13, 1926).

anthologies of poetry which "give the general impression that poetry is cold soup." He believed that it was utterly impossible for a poet to make a decent living from the income on his verse, declaring that "all poets of forty-six do two men's work and cheerfully expect to. Most of the wives do their own washing and the poet cheerfully hangs it out to dry."

Babette Deutsch,³ writing of the poet's plight in America, was as pessimistic as Lindsay. She took pains to make it clear that she was voicing the opinion of other poets as well as her own when she declared that "poetry in America is not what it used to be...Time was," she recalled, "when verse was flowering from North of Boston to the country of the corn-huskers, covering the slabs of the sunburnt west with beauty, and springing up out of the very mud of the stockyards...Why, only ten years ago, was the reading of verse so common? Why, today, don't people read it? And why do other people still feel the compulsion to go on writing it?" The gist of her answer to these questions is this: "The bootlegger's patron finds escape in the bootlegger's offering; the movie fan finds it in the spreading custard pie; innocent youth finds it chasing the pigskin; ladies of leisure find it in the confections of the Michael Arlen school."

³American Mercury, VIII, 66-7.

As contrasted with these means of liberation, poetry is utterly negligible....Poetry, in fine, is not a release at all, but a discipline." What an oldfashioned ring has all this. And she is partly right: poetry is a discipline; but the question that critics of poetry at the present time are ever and ever more fond of asking is, "But is the quarry worth the questing?"

In a recent number of The Forum, Gustav Davidson,⁴ surveying the changing status of poetry in its relation to man, stated the case for the reader: "No. Poetry has not fallen. It has not even slipped. The truth is, poetry is still at the heart of the world, animating it in all of its multiple and dazzlingly far-flung endeavors. For poetry is being written today not merely in the rhythm of ductile dactyls and spattering spondees, but in the rhythm of zeppelins, span-bridges, automats and jazz bands. The poet who centuries ago used terza rima or Homeric hexameters as the anvil on which he struck forth divine sparks, used today the laboratory and blue print, the ticker and tabulator. These are the modern fulcra for moving the world and making it dance."

If it is true that something is wrong with American poetry just now, as a goodly amount of testimony

⁴The Forum, LXXIX, p. XXXIV (illustrated section).

from poets and the critics (and inferentially from the public) would indicate, then signs of this falling off will of necessity be found in the poetry being written today.

One of the most refreshingly candid and uncompromising critiques of American poetry of today came from the pen of Edmund Wilson⁵ in 1926. The "new poetry" movement which looked up so promisingly twelve years ago, has, in his opinion, left a train of disillusion and disappointment in its wake. "Who can believe in its heroes now?" asks Mr. Wilson. Edgar Lee Masters has done only one creditable thing, Spoon River, according to him. Lindsay's work at its best is spoiled by the "incurable cheapness and looseness which are rampant in the rest of his work." While admiring Sandburg's "real instinct for language," Mr. Wilson finds on reading him that he is quite uninteresting, his emotions meager, and his ideas all too obvious. The work of Amy Lowell is characterized as being like "a great empty cloisonné jar," and that of Mr. Fletcher "a great wall of hard descriptive prose mistaken for poetry." Mr. Wilson thinks Robert Frost is the most overrated poet of the pioneer group. Stony words these: "Robert Frost has

⁵ New Republic, XLVII, 161-2.

a thin but authentic vein of poetic sensibility, but he is excessively dull and writes abominable verse." He gives H. B. credit for writing well, but, as in the case of Sandburg, he can discover little in her. He finds the new generation of women lyric poets more satisfying and genuinely distinctive. Sara Teasdale, Elinor Wylie, Louise Bogan, Leonie Adams, Genevieve Taggard, Babette Deutsch, Laura Gottschalk, and Dorothy Parker are all praised in varying degree, but it is Edna Millay who receives the crown of laurel. Among the men, Mr. Wilson acknowledges his preference for Edwin Arlington Robinson and T. S. Eliot. Of them he says: "Though he (Robinson) has recently run much into the sands of long and arid blank verse narratives, I believe that he is one of the poets of our time most likely to survive as an American classic. Both he and Eliot, despite the disappointing tendency of their poetic motors to get stalled, despite their exasperating hypochondrias of the soul, have had the authentic lyric gift and artist's mastery of it."

Gorham B. Munson,⁶ one of the younger converts to the Paul Elmer More and Irving Babbitt brand of humanism, wrote of Robinson in 1927: "Mr. Robinson is now our best living representative of this negative polarity of New England, but the vitality and dimensions of what he has

⁶Saturday Review, III, 640.

to utter have shrunk. His work, that is to say, suggests that bleak monotonous season that lies between the dying brilliance of autumn and the white death of winter." Mr. Robinson's shorter, less pretentious poems were far more to Mr. Munson's liking than his longer ones like Merlin and Lancelot. Edmund Wilson, in the same year on almost the same date, had this to say: "...But with all respect for a fine poet and for one of the few really honorably won American reputations of our time, I would still give the whole of Mr. Robinson's Arthurian cycle, with its conventional romantic stage properties of unrecreated castles, seas and wars and its false starts at passionate expression always foundering in 'before we knew what we were yet to see' and 'until we saw as far as we should know', for a single one of his New England elegies."⁷

Isabel Patterson wrote of Tristram, "What Mr. Robinson's admirers praise in him is his prose quality, in which, barring the terminology they are right. If he had sufficient invention--and perhaps he has, unutilized--he could write an excellent modern novel... But when I look for lines of which one may say, 'That is unforgettable, immortal', I cannot find them."⁸

⁷New Republic, L, 319.

⁸McNaught's Monthly, VIII, 28.

It is perfectly obvious that the poets, Mr. Robinson in particular, against whom judgment has just been assessed by a few presumed honest but unconvinced critics, have not been given a wholly fair hearing. But criticism, severe and for the most part adverse, has been chosen to the exclusion of more favorable and perhaps more just varieties, for the very reason that it is not truly representative of the critical attitude at large toward these major poets and prophets of the "new poetry" movement. This general critical attitude ranges in degree of appreciation from the patently spiteful and vindictive, on through the mildly apologetic to the rankly lush and indiscriminating, and is therefore of slight value, throwing little or no light on the present status of American poetry. To discover aberrations and ailments it is often necessary to go to the brutally frank.

Fortunately, the fact remains that whether or not the better established reputations in American poetry have been losing ground during the past few years, a large and "promising" crop of "minor" poets continue in the service of the Muse. And that is leaving out of account men like Robinson Jeffers and William Ellery Leonard, too.

II

The cry for a strictly indigenous type of American poetry is an old, old cry, and a cry that seemingly will never down. Just what such thoroughly native poetry would be like has never been satisfactorily explained. Throughout practically the whole of the nineteenth century this nugget of admonition formed no small part of the typical British critic's stock in trade when the subject under discussion was a new volume of American poetry. The poetry of Whitman and Miller, and the verse of Harte, went a long way toward meeting these exacting requirements as they had been formulated by critical voices across the sea.

Near the end of the last century, this call for poetry unmistakably and indelibly American began to be sent out under native auspices. It became the slogan of America's coming of age movement in literature and art of the present century.

Today, the call to take up literary arms against England in particular and the world in general in the name of our national cultural integrity is less often heard but nevertheless more subtly, intensely, and widely felt. But even though it were desirable, it is extremely doubtful whether American poetry will ever

be produced that is one hundred per cent pure. And assuming that such poetry is possible, whose word could we take that it was so? As a writer in The Nation⁹ remarked, we are now and then advised by certain enthusiasts to seek out our really native past among the Indians, with whom spiritually we have hardly more in common than with the Hottentot. Such misconceptions of what "native" literature is or should be are taken a great deal more seriously than they deserve.

But when Charles A. Beard¹⁰ points out, as so many others have pointed out before him, that a young Machine Age must create its own art patterns attuned to its own peculiar tempo and rhythm if it is to be valid; when W. L. Werner,¹¹ commenting on an analysis of American literature by Norman Foerster, declares that "Realism and Romanticism are stale and unscientific distinctions;" and when Mary Colum¹² says that "Struggling to apply these terms [Romanticism and Classicism] somehow to American literature may supply an interesting course in intellectual gymnastics, but for any literature produced in this country up to the present they have no real or practicable application;" when Lewis Mumford,¹³ anent the

⁹The Nation, CXXI, 348.

¹⁰Harper's Monthly, CLVII, 270.

¹¹Saturday Review, II, 758.

¹²Saturday Review, IV, 998.

¹³New Republic, LVI, 50.

critical philosophies of More, Babbitt, and Foerster, says that "To anyone with a strong sense of what the classics are, the notion of the Romantic movement as an aberration of the mind is one of the funniest that has imposed itself upon the scholarly imagination"--when such statements are made we should pay them the courtesy of respectful attention, at least indicating as they do a healthy impatience with inappropriate, if not necessarily outmoded, critical measuring rods.

It is possible, however, to carry this pursuit of things indigenous to an unprofitable extreme. The "Americanism" of Vachel Lindsay is an example in point.

Joseph Warren Beach, vigorously stressing our need for an American literature, bolder, more original, and more truly reflective of American life, remarks that "In fiction, perhaps, and certainly in poetry, our prayers are being answered, and we have at least a Frost, a Masters, and a Sandburg to offer as the first fruits of a new age. These are authors representative, distinctively American in flavor, and full of invention in form and style."¹⁴ Right or wrong, Mr. Beach's commentary comes as a relief simply by reason of the fact

¹⁴The Outlook for American Prose, p. 21.

that he has seen fit to omit from consideration in this connection the author of General Booth and The Congo. During the past few years it has become a critical custom, almost religiously observed not only in this country but abroad, to direct all seekers after the poetic embodiment of the American essence to the poetry of Vachel Lindsay.

Edgar Lee Masters calls Lindsay "a plant native to the Lincoln country, more native to it than any other American writer;"¹⁵ Herbert S. Gorman conceives of him as the pivotal point "in the future of our autochthonous verse;"¹⁶ H. Phelps Putnam senses in his work "the swing of emotion in jagged lines which catalogue not ships but the states of this Union;"¹⁷ Louis Untermeyer sees his catholicity as "representative of a great part of his country;"¹⁸ and we could go on. Let it suffice to bring discussion of this particular phase of current criticism of poetry to a close by citing the opinions of a few critics seemingly out of sympathy with over-worked practice of attaching to the work of certain of our poets (Mr. Lindsay almost exclusively) the tag "Strictly Native."

¹⁵The Bookman, LXIV, 156.

¹⁶North American Review, CCXIX, 123.

¹⁷Atlantic Monthly, CXXXII, 16 (Bookshelf).

¹⁸Modern American Poetry (1925), p. 269.

Chauncey B. Tinker, committed to the position that "universality has been a mark of poetry throughout the ages," and believing that American poets would some day "wake from their dream of a sublime poetry which smacks of Americanism and owes nothing to Europe," said: "Suppose that Mr. Lindsay and his native urge should fail us after all? Suppose, in short, that there were to be no indigenous poetry--none, that it, with any readers? We have an architecture that is all our own. We have given to the world a kind of building, soaring, incredible, American, that serves as an emblem of our very soul. Is it impossible that we should strike out an American poetry that is as incontestably our own?"¹⁹

Quoting a recently-made statement of Edward Davison's to the effect that Mr. Lindsay "is in fact the most American of American poets," Arthur Colton comments as follows: "It (this standardized attitude toward Lindsay) involves much the same confusion as once proclaimed Whitman 'At last, the American poet!' These two poets seem to the average Englishman 'American,' because they seem to him boisterous, disheveled, and odd.

¹⁹Atlantic Monthly, CXXXVIII, 541.

But that is much the way they seem to an average American, who is not very fond of oddity or disheveled boisterousness. It was Longfellow and not Whitman who appealed to him, and I suspect more of us Americans are like Mr. Frost or Mr. Masters than are like Mr. Lindsay. Perhaps not. I suspect at least that they have more readers."²⁰

Ellen Glasgow's reaction to this situation is flavored with irony: "Mr. Robinson, it seems, is less American because he is aware of the classics; Mr. Frost is less American because he has brushed the hem of Wordsworth's philosophy; but it is worthy of remark that when Mr. Lindsay breaks into 'The boom of the blood-lust song' and thumps the loud African drum he is not barbaric, he is not even foreign--he is merely being 'the most American of American poets.'"²¹

After the term "Americanism" has been adequately defined to the complete satisfaction of all, this critical haze now enveloping the literary landscape will be dispelled, perhaps.

²⁰ Saturday Review, V, 19.

²¹ N. Y. Herald Tribune Books, 1V, 5-6 (May 13, 1928).

III

Anyone who has followed magazine verse rather closely during the past few years is well aware of the fact that "upper-bracket" poetry is being woven out of very subtle strands of imagery and thought. That it is more refined, more technically sound, no one will deny. But that it is better poetry a great many do not believe. There is something missing. Current poetry lacks those qualities, it seems, which have endeared it to the hearts and minds of normally intelligent and sensitive readers through the centuries.

During those vibrant "renaissance" years poetry fired and nourished, crude and sprawling though it often was. But now it has given up its yawpish, prize-ring ways and thrown in its lot with the intelligentsia. The native Muse, once a "country cousin," has quit roaming the city streets and has sought philosophic serenity in drawing rooms. The term "metaphysical" used merely in a historically poetic sense might justifiably be applied to the kind of verse that is so popular with the poets at present. Many respected critics, at any rate, express themselves as feeling when reading current verse of this kind much as the person to whom metaphysics was "the seeking by a blind man in a dark

alley of a black cat that isn't there."

This poetry of "ideas" is too obscure and indefinite, too fâne-spun and cold for most appetites. As a reaction against the questionable practice of overloading verse with ethical and social baggage it is to be commended; as an attempt to go behind the obvious, to explore the uncharted shades of intellect and the senses, it has its points; and we agree with these earnest adventurers into thin air when they come out warmly against the exploitation of feelings, ready-made and all too often cheap and banal. The only question that cannot apparently be resolved away is, "But what of the price that is being paid?"

A portentous number of papers touching if not directly attacking this particular aspect of contemporary poetry have appeared in the course of the past few months.

I. A. R. Wylie, in a recent Century paper, disturbingly titled "Twilight among the Authors," said: "It is easy to depict ourselves as being entirely concerned with bonds, radios, motor cars, soda fountains and the latest labor-saving devices... It is still easier to depict man as a sort of intellectual and emotional Ford car with standardized emotions, complexes

and reactions...It is not so easy to depict man as a lost son of God, baffled, confused, tormented and self-tormenting, but none the less heroically battling his way through to his unknown goal. That is why there are so few poets."²²

Henry Seidel Canby²³ sees the current almost insatiable hunger for a literature of knowledge not altogether an unmixed blessing. This overemphasis upon knowing at the expense of feeling and imagining may be clearsighted, he admits, but it is shortsighted as well. Most of the best poetry in our day, he notes, is analytical and ironic. Man frustrate is the ever-recurring theme. It is when the poet makes some contribution to scientific knowledge that he is most in tune with the age. "Either poetry bows to the modern need for more knowledge of the creative man, or it is a literature of the minority, not in strong rebellion against shortsighted success, like Whitman, Browning, Emerson, but plaintive, esoteric, and expecting no world acceptance." In Mr. Canby's opinion "Bankers, manufacturers, and engineers have usurped a creative leadership which belongs to education, morality, and art."

²²The Century, CXV, 146-7.

²³Saturday Review, IV, 818, 824.

After drawing a convincing contrast between the poetry of Dryden, Pope, Gray, Goldsmith, and Byron, --poetry which so frequently achieved that rare union "of high literary distinction and wide popular appeal" --and the pervasively occult poetry of De La Mare, Lowell, Robinson, Yeats, A. E., Millay, and Frost, Chauncey B. Tinker closes with these words: "That we have much to admire and much to love in modern verse, I, who happen to be an enthusiast for all the poets of our day here mentioned, should be the last to deny. But I do not intend that my love of their somewhat exotic beauties should blind me to the plain fact that that very exoticism excludes from the world of readers many who should be happy citizens of it."²⁴

If modern poetry appears to be on the verge of severing all vital connections with earth and the man in the street--becoming a kind of sublimated disembodied intelligence--it must be due, in part at least, to causes over which the poet has little or no control. The post-war critical reaction to blustering formlessness helped materially, no doubt, to tone down extravagance and rehabilitate the prestige of traditional verse forms (the sonnet is very popular with poets at present). It is also true that much deflation-period poetry criticism

²⁴Yale Review, XVII, 689.

explicitly recommended a turning away from "externals," exhorting the poet to explore the black midnights and cold twilights of the soul. But to attribute to criticism of this nature full responsibility for a flood of poetry which shows symptoms of being a creative end-process of such criticism is risky. It is more than likely that both this criticism and this poetry were brought up together on the same husks: both surface manifestations of a common spiritual malady against the ravages of which a Machine Age has as yet found no antidote.

Just as many religionists see Science as the arch-destroyer of religious values, so that astute psychologist-critic, I. A. Richards,²⁵ sees Science making devastating inroads upon the creative spirit of the poet. In 1926 he thus summed up the dilemma: "Suddenly, not long ago, he (man) began to get genuine knowledge on a large scale. The process went faster and faster; it snowballed. Now he has to face the fact that the edifices of supposed knowledge, with which he has for so long buttressed and supported his attitudes, will no longer stand up, and, at the same time, he has to

²⁵Saturday Review, II, 833. See also his "Science and Poetry" in Atlantic Monthly, CXXXVI, 481-91.

recognize 'that pure knowledge is neutral as regards his aims, that it has no direct bearing upon what he should feel, or what he should attempt to do!'"

The close kinship which exists between the poetic mood and the religious attitude has been remarked from time immemorial. Robert Lynd, writing in the September, 1928, number of the Atlantic, endeavors to show that literature declines because it has outgrown the Canterbury of Chaucer and the Olympus of Homer. He says: "My own belief--and there is some evidence for it--is that literature begins to go to the dogs as soon as Earth becomes restive and declares its independence of Heaven. In the great ages of literature, Earth was, if not a suburb of Heaven, a subject kingdom."²⁶

Oswald Spengler, that much maligned, much pilfered, now much misunderstood, but withal much respected, analyst of the peculiar ways and wheretoes of cultures and civilizations, who has probably ranged more widely and plumbed more deeply in this matter than has anyone else of his time, might be worth listening to. "To birth belongs death," he says, "to youth age, to life generally its form and its allotted span.

²⁶Atlantic Monthly, CXLII, 335.

The present is a civilized, emphatically not a cultured time, and ipso facto a great number of life-capacities fall out as impossible. This may be deplorable, and may be and will be deplored in pessimist philosophy and poetry, but it is not in our power to make otherwise. I It will not be--already it is not--permissible to defy clear historical experience and to expect, merely because we hope, that this will spring or that will flourish...We are civilized, not Gothic or Rococo, people; we have to reckon with the hard cold facts of a late life, to which the parallel is to be found not in Pericles's Athens but in Caesar's Rome. Of great painting or great music there can no longer be, for Western people, any question. Their architectural possibilities have been exhausted these hundred years. Only extensive possibilities are left to them...And I can only hope that men of the new generation may be moved by this book to devote themselves to technics instead of lyrics, the sea instead of the paint-brush, and politics instead of epistemology. Better they could not do."²⁷

A gloomy outlook, indeed. Should we try to be unlike that hypothetical individual of Spengler's

²⁷ The Decline of the West, Vol. I, pp. 40-1.

"who, standing before an exhausted quarry, would rather be told that a new vein will be struck tomorrow--the bait offered by the radically false and mannerized art of the moment--than be shown a rich and virgin clay-bed nearby," or should we try to give the lie to such an attitude by pointing with confidence to such recent manifestations, and perchance, auguries, as Tristram, John Brown's Body, Negro spirituals, Sandburg's The American Songbag, Indian epics, poetry of the range and prairie, The King's Henchman, Two Lives, and a reassuring host of younger voices?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

CHAPTER ONE.

- Beard, C. A. and M. R. The Rise of American Civilization. (2 vols.) N. Y. Macmillan, 1927.
- Beer, Thomas. Stephen Crane: A Study in American Letters. With an introduction by Joseph Conrad. N. Y. Knopf, 1923.
- Boyd, Ernest, "The Father of Them All." American Mercury, VI (Dec., 1925), 451-58.
- Davidson, Thomas, "Our Servility in Literature." The Forum, XI, (May, 1891) 342-9.
- Fisher, S. G., "Has Immigration Slowed up American Literature?" The Forum, XVI, (Jan., 1894) 560-67.
- Foerster, Norman. American Poetry and Prose. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1925. (The Riverside Press).
- Gosse, Edmund. "Has America Produced a Poet?" The Forum, VI, (Oct., 1888) 176-186.
- Holloway, Emory. Whitman: An Interpretation in Narrative. N. Y.: Knopf, 1926.
- Monroe, Harriet, and Henderson, A. C. (Editors). The Poetry. N. Y.: Macmillan, 1924.
- O'Sullivan, Vincent, "American Critic." Living Age, CCCIII, (Dec. 27, 1919) 798-802.
- Pattee, Fred Lewis. A History of American Literature Since 1870. N. Y.: Century, 1915.
- Redman, Ben Ray, "Old Wine in New Bottles." New York Herald Tribune Books, IV, (March 18, 1928) 10.
- Strunsky, Simeon, "A Survey of American Literature Since 1900." New York Times Magazine, (Feb. 12, 1928) pp. 1, 2, 16, 17.

- Tomlinson, H. M., "Two Americans and a Whale." Harper's Monthly, CLII, (April, 1926) 618-21.
- Untermeyer, Louis. American Poetry Since 1900. N. Y.: Holt, 1927.
- Untermeyer, Louis. (Editor). Modern American Poetry: A Critical Anthology. N. Y.: Harcourt, Brace, 1925.
- Van Doren, Carl and Mark. American and British Literature Since 1890. N. Y. and London: Century, 1925.
- Van Doren, Carl, "Stephen Crane." American Mercury, I, (Jan., 1924) 11-14.
- Watts, Thomas, "Future of American Literature." Fortnightly Review, LV, (June 1, 1891) 910-26.
- Wilkinson, Marguerite. New Voices. N. Y.: Macmillan, 1926.

CHAPTER TWO.

- Anonymous, "Century of American Poetry." The Dial, XXIX, (Oct. 16, 1900) 257-59.
- Anonymous, "Rejection of Poetry." The Dial, XXXVI, (June 1, 1904) 353-55.
- Anonymous, "Slump in Poetry." The Critic, XLVI, (March, April, 1905) 263-67, 347-50.
- Anonymous, "Need of Poets." The Outlook, LXXXVI, (May 11, 1907) 53-55.
- Boynton, H. W., "Recent Amusing Verse." The Bookman, XXI, (April, 1905) 176-80.
- Boynton, H. W., "Poetry and Commonplace." Atlantic Monthly, XC, (Oct., 1902) 553-59.
- Catlin, H. D. "Form of Poetry." Harper's Monthly, CVI, (May, 1903) 977-78.

- Hooker, B., "New Poets and Old Poetry." The Bookman, XXI, (July, 1910) 480-6.
- Howells, W. D., "Editor's Easy Chair." Harper's Monthly, CVI, (Jan., 1903) 324-25.
- Macy, John, "State of Pseudo-Poetry at the Present Time." The Bookman, XXVII, (July, 1908) 513-17.
- Shackford, M. H., "Contemporary Poetry." The Dial, XL, (April 16, 1906) 249-53.
- Triggs, O. L., "Century of American Poetry." The Forum, XXX, (Jan., 1901) 630-40.

CHAPTER THREE.

- Anonymous, "New Philosophy Announced in a Recent Number of Poesia." The Bookman, XXIX, (Aug., 1909) 584-7.
- Anonymous, "Reign of the Elemental." The Nation, XCI, (Oct. 6, 1910) 307-8.
- Anonymous, "America's Literary Needs." Review of Reviews, XLI, (April, 1910) 498-9.
- Anonymous, "Misguided Poets." The Dial, L, (Feb. 16, 1911) 113-14.
- Anonymous, "What is Our New Poetry to be?" Review of Reviews, XLIII, (June, 1911) 728-29.
- Anonymous, "Poetry of Modern America." Review of Reviews, XLVI, (Dec., 1912) 745-46.
- Anonymous, "Case of Poetry." The Dial, LIII, (Dec. 16, 1912) 477-79.
- Anonymous, "Democracy and Poetry by Gummere (a review)." The Dial, LI, (Dec. 16, 1912) 524-27.

Anonymous, "Gutter Verse." The Century, LXII, (Aug., 1912) 634-35.

Anonymous (A. W. P.), "Word for Magazine Verse." The Dial, LII, (April 16, 1912) 308.

Anonymous, "Books of the Coming Year." The Dial, LIII, (Sept. 16, 1912) 179-81.

Anonymous, "Great Poets to Sidestep Us." Literary Digest, XLV, (Oct. 5, 1912) 563-64.

Canby, H. S., "Prize Poetry." The Nation, XCI, (Nov. 3, 1910) 413-15.

Le Gallienne, R., "Younger Choir." The Forum, XLIII, (June, 1910) 651-601.

Hooker, B., "Present American Poetry." The Forum, XLII, (Aug., 1909) 148-56.

Moore, C. L., "Interregnum in American Literature." The Dial, (May 1, 1910) 308-09.

Moore, C. L., "Two Recent American Classics." The Dial, XLIX, (Sept. 1, 1910) 105-07.

Watson, William, "Muse in Exile." The Century, EXI, n. s., (April, 1912) 944-48.

CHAPTER FOUR.

Adcock, A. S., "Poetry of War." Living Age, CCLXXXIII, (Nov. 14, 1914) 398-407.

Alden, R. M., "New Poetry." The Nation, XCVI, (April 17, 1913) 386-87.

Anonymous, "Taking Poetry Too Seriously." The Nation, XCVI, (Feb. 20, 1913) 173-4.

Anonymous, "Two Poetry Magazines." The Outlook, CIII, (Feb. 1, 1913) 243-44.

Anonymous, "Creative Literature." Harper's Monthly, CXXVI, (Jan., 1913) 313-16.

- Anonymous, "Town and the Country Muse." The Nation, XC VII, (Dec. 11, 1913) 558-59.
- Anonymous, "Review of Lyfic Year." North American Review, CXC VII, (Feb., 1913) 283-84.
- Anonymous, "General Booth Enters, etc." Literary Digest, XLVI, (Mar. 8, 1913) 541.
- Anonymous, "New Lamps for Old." The Dial, LVI, (Mar. 16, 1914) 231-33.
- Anonymous, "Books by Old Maids for Old Maids (interview with G. Brandes)". The Independent, LXXVIII, (June 15, 1914) 484.
- Anonymous, "Our Literary Poverty." New Republic, I, (Nov. 21, 1914) 10-11.
- Benet, W. R., "Poetry by the Pound." The Dial, LIV, (June 1, 1913) 450.
- Bradley, W. A., "Lyres and Laureates." The Bookman, XXXVII, (April, 1913) 191-99.
- Bradley, W. A., "New Poetry." The Bookman, XL, (Oct., 1914) 202-10.
- Hart, R., "Authoritative Criticism of Poetry in America." North American Review, CXC VIII, (Sept., 1913) 413-15.
- Henderson, A. C., "Recent Poetry." The Dial, LVII, (Oct. 1, 1914) 253-55.
- Henderson (A. C.) and Monroe (H.), "Plea for the New Art." The Nation, (May 1, 1913) 441.
- Monroe, H., "Poetry and the Other Fine Arts." The Dial, LIV, (June 16, 1913) 497.
- Moore, C. L., "Poetic Expression." The Dial, LVI, (Feb. 16, 1914) 131-32.
- Moore, C. L., "Literature in War and Peace." The Dial, LVII, (Oct. 1, 1914) 241-43.
- Pulsifier, H. T., "Poetry and the Average Man." The Outlook, CIII, (Feb. 1, 1913) 259-62.

- Putnam, Samuel, "Chicago: An Obituary." American Mercury, VIII, (Aug., 1926) 417-25.
- Rice, Wallace, "Mr. Ezra Pound and Poetry." The Dial, LIV, (May 1, 1913) 370-71.
- Rice, Wallace, "Ex Libra et Libra." The Dial, LIV, (June 1, 1913) 449-50.
- Vale, C., "Lyric Year." The Forum, XLIX, (Jan., 1913) 91-106.
- Wyatt, Edith, "Old and New Poetry." The Dial, LVI, (May 1, 1914) 375-76.

CHAPTER FIVE.

- Aiken, C., "Confectionery and Caviar." The Dial, LXIII, (Nov. 22, 1917) 513-15.
- Aiken, C., "Places of Imagism." New Republic, III, (May 22, 1915) 75-76.
- Aiken, C., "Limits to Imagism." New Republic, III, (June 26, 1915) 204-05.
- Alden, R. M., "Recent Poetry." The Dial, LXI, (July 15, 1916) 59-65.
- Alden, R. M., "Recent Poetry." The Dial, LIX, (June 24, 1915) 26-30.
- Anonymous, "The New Poetry." Review of Reviews, LIV, (Aug., 1916) 233.
- Anonymous, "Reflections for Poets." Literary Digest, LIX, (Nov. 16, 1918) 31.
- Anonymous, "Discovered in England - A Real American Poet." Current Opinion, LVIII, (June, 1915) 427-28.
- Anonymous, "War and the Literature of the Future." Current Opinion, LVIII, (June, 1915) 427.
- Bodenheim, M., "What is Poetry?" New Republic, XIII, (Dec. 22, 1917) 211-12.

- Bradley, W. A., "Four American Poets." The Dial,
LXI, (Dec. 14, 1916) 528-30.
- Braithwaite, W. S., "Year in Poetry." The Bookman,
XLV, (May, 1917) 278-82.
- Braithwaite, W. S., "Imagism: Another View." New
Republic, III, (June 12, 1915) 154-55.
- Braithwaite, W. S., "Year in Poetry." The Bookman,
XLV, (June, 1917) 429-40.
- Canby, H. S., "Poetry for the Unpoetical." Harper's
Monthly, CXXXII, (Jan., 1916) 291-96.
- Colum, P., "Imagists." The Dial, LXII, (Feb. 22, 1917)
125-27.
- Comer, C. A. P., "Poetry Today." Atlantic Monthly, CXVII,
(April, 1916) 493-98.
- Cutter, R., "And the Flood Was Forty Days Upon the Earth."
The Nation, CIV, (Feb. 1, 1917) 141-42.
- Eastman, Max, "Poetic Education in Slang." New Republic,
IX, (Dec. 16, 1916) 182-84.
- Ficke, A. D., "Metrical Freedom and the Contemporary Poet."
The Dial, LVIII, (Jan. 1, 1915) 11-13.
- Firkins, O. W., "The New Movement in Poetry." The Nation,
CI, (Oct. 14, 1915) 458-61.
- Firkins, O. W., "American Verse Recently Published." The
Nation, CIII, (Aug. 17, 1916) 151-52.
- Firkins, O. W., "Cricketts on the Hearth." The Nation,
CVII, (July 27, 1918) 98-100.
- Firkins, O. W., "Poets of the Day." The Nation, CI,
(Aug. 19, 1915) 228-29.
- Firkins, O. W., "Poets of Today." The Nation, C, (Feb.
4, 1915) 139-40.
- Firkins, O. W., "Singers and Satirists." The Nation, CIV,
(Feb. 8, 1917) 157-58.
- Firkins, O. W., "Assorted Poets." The Nation, CVII,
(Oct. 26, 1918) 488-89.

- Garnett, Edward, "Critical Note on American Poets." Atlantic Monthly, CXX, (Sept., 1917) 366-73.
- Gay, R. M., "A Spark of Nature's Fire." Atlantic Monthly, CXVIII, (July, 1916) 98-103.
- Henderson, A. C., "New School of Poetry." Poetry, VIII? (May, 1916) 103-05.
- Holley, H., "Poets Return." The Forum, LIII, (June, 1915) 759-62.
- Howells, W. D., "Recent Verse." Harper's Monthly, CXXXI, (Sept., 1915) 634-37.
- Lippmann, W., "Miss Lowell and Things." New Republic, VI, (Mar. 18, 1916) 178-79.
- Masters, E. L., "What is Poetry?" Poetry, VI, (Sept., 1915) 306-08.
- Marolf, L. C., "Imperishable Elements of Poetry." The Dial, LIX, (Sept. 16, 1915) 207-08.
- Monroe, H., "Give Him Room." Poetry, VI, (May, 1915) 81-84.
- Monroe, H., "Its Inner Meaning." Poetry, VI, (Sept., 1915) 302-05.
- Patterson, W. M., "New Verse and New Prose." North American Review, CCVII, (Feb., 1918) 257-67.
- Pound, E., "Vorticism." Forthightly Review, CII, (Sept., 1914) 461-71.
- Pound, E., "Renaissance." Poetry, V, (Feb., 1915) 227-33.
- Rittenhouse, J. B., "Contemporary Poetry." The Bookman, XLVII, (April, 1918) 199-207.
- Shepard, O., "Versified Henry James." The Dial, LXIII, (Oct. 11, 1917) 339-41.
- Smith, L. W., "New Naivete." Atlantic Monthly, CXVII, (April, 1916) 487-92.

Untermeyer, L., "Why a Poet Should Never be Educated." The Dial, LXIV, (Feb. 14, 1918) 145-47.

Warner, H. E., "Poetry and Other Things." The Dial, LXI, (Aug. 15, 1916) 91-94.

CHAPTER SIX

Anderson, M., "Note on Modern Poetry." New Republic, XXVI, (June 22, 1921) 112-13.

Anonymous, "Peace and the Poets." The Nation, CVIII, (May 31, 1919) 858.

Anonymous, "Poets and the Peace." The Nation, CIX, 454 (Oct. 4, 1919)

Anonymous, "In Time of Need." The Nation, CVIII, (June 7, 1919) 905.

Anonymous, "Poetry by the Penny Worth." Atlantic Monthly, CXXIII, (Jan., 1919) 862-64.

Anonymous, "Rage for Poetry," Literary Digest, LXXV, (Dec. 2, 1922) 33.

Anonymous, "Writing Down American Literature." Literary Digest, LXXVIII, (July 28, 1923) 28.

Anonymous, "Poets Attesting Themselves." Literary Digest, LXXIX, (Oct. 13, 1923) 31-32.

Anonymous, "Paradox of Poetry." The Outlook, CXXXIII, (April 4, 1923) 609.

Anonymous, "Shorter Hours for Poets." The Outlook, CXXXIII, (Jan. 10, 1923) 61-62.

Anonymous, "Literature in Limbo." The Nation, CXIX, (July 30, 1924) 110.

Bodenheim, M., "Tendencies in Modern Poetry and Prose." North American Review, CCXIII, (April, 1921) 551-55.

Bridges, R., "Paper on Free Verse." North American Review, CCXVI, (Nov., 1922) 647-58.

- Burr, A. J., "Expanded Interest in Poetry." The Bookman, L, (Sept., 1919) 82-85.
- De La Mare, W., "Reading of Contemporary Poetry." Living Age, CCCI, (June 21, 1919) 791-95.
- Eaton, W. P., "Influence of Free Verse on Prose." Atlantic Monthly, CXXIV, (Oct., 1919) 491-96.
- Gibbs, A. H., "Poets of the New Patriotism." New Republic, XXII, (Mar. 17, 1920) 90-93.
- Green, C. M., "Poetry Books Manifold." The Bookman, L, (Feb., 1920) 633-39.
- Guiterman, A., "How to Become an Authority on Poetry." The Bookman, (Oct., 1919) 181-85.
- Hill, F. E., "Why We Don't Read Poetry." New Republic, XXXVII, (Dec. 5, 1923) 10-14 sup.
- Lewisohn, L., "Poet and His Moment." The Nation, CXI, (July 10, 1920) 42.
- Lowell, A., "Two Generations in American Poetry." New Republic, XXXVII, (Dec. 5, 1923) 1-3 sup.
- McFee, W., "Poetry and Youth." The Bookman, LV, (Aug., 1922) 612-13.
- Monroe, H., "What Next?" Poetry, XV, (Oct., 1919) 33-38.
- Towne, C. H., "Vanished Yeats, the Never-Vanishing Kipling, and Some Others." The Bookman, XLIX, (July, 1919) 616-22.
- Untermeyer, L., "Return of the Vers Libertine." The Nation, CXIV, (June 7, 1922) 686-87.
- Weaver, R. M., "Some Currents and Backwaters of Contemporary Poetry." The Bookman, LI, (June, 1920) 453-60.
- Weaver, R. M., "What Ails Pegasus?" The Bookman, LII, (Sept., 1920) 57-66.

CHAPTER SEVEN.

- Anonymous, "Spoiled Child of the Arts." Saturday Review, III, (May 7, 1927) 797.
- Anonymous, "Native Literature." The Nation, CXXI, (Sept., 30, 1925) 348.
- Beach, J. W., Outlook for American Prose. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1926.
- Beard, C. A., "Is Western Civilization in Peril?" Harper's Monthly, CLVII, (Aug., 1928) 265-73.
- Canby, H. S., "Diadems and Fagots." Saturday Review, IV, (April 28, 1928) 817, 18, 24.
- Colum, Mary M., "Some American Criticism." Saturday Review, IV, (June 30, 1928) 997-98.
- Davidson, G., "Poetry - As Bread or Cake." The Forum, LXXIX, (June, 1928) pp. XXXII, XXXIV, Illustrated section.
- Deutsch, B., "The Plight of the Poet." American Mercury, VIII, (May, 1926) 66-68.
- Glasgow, E., "What is Americanism?" N. Y. Herald Tribune Books, IV, (May 13, 1928) 1, 5, 6.
- Gorman, H. S., "Vachel Lindsay: Evangelist of Poetry." North American Review, CCXIX, (Jan., 1924) 123-28.
- Lindsay, V., "What It Means to be a Poet in America." Saturday Evening Post, CXCIX, 12, 13, 45, 46, 48, (Nov. 13, 1926).
- Lynd, R., "Why Literature Declines." Atlantic Monthly, CXLII, (Sept., 1928) 334-42.
- Masters, E. L., "Vachel Lindsay." The Bookman, BXIV, (Oct., 1926) 156-60.
- Mumford, L., "Interpreters of America." New Republic, LVI, (Sept. 5, 1928) 77-78.
- Munson, G. B., "Edwin Arlington Robinson." Saturday Review, III, 239 (May 21, 1927) 839-40.
- Patterson, I., "A Suburban Tristram and a South Dakota Saga." McNaught's Monthly, VIII, (July, 1927) 28-30.

- Putnam, H. P. "Collected Poems, by Vachel Lindsay (a review)" Atlantic Monthly, CXXXII, (August, 1923) p. 16, Bookshelf.
- Richards, I. A., "Science and Poetry." Saturday Review, II, (June 5, 1926) 833-34.
- Richards, I. A., "Science and Poetry." Atlantic Monthly, CXXXVI, (Oct., 1925) 481-91.
- Spengler, O. The Decline of the West. N. Y.: Knopf, Vol. I, 1926.
- Tinker, C. B., "Reciprocity." Atlantic Monthly, CXXXVIII, (Oct., 1926) 539-45.
- Tinker, C. B., "Figures in a Dream." Yale Review, XVII, (July, 1928) 670-89.
- Werner, W. L., "Reply to Foerster." Saturday Review, II, (May 1, 1926) 758.
- Wilson, E., "The Literary Vaudeville." New Republic, XLVII, (June 30, 1926) 158-63.
- Wilson, E., "The Muses Out of Work." New Republic, L, (May 11, 1927) 319-21.
- Wylie, I. A. R., "Twilight Among the Authors." The Century, CXV, (Dec., 1927) 143-48.

RAPID SURVEY, CHRONOLOGICALLY ARRANGED (1900-18)

1. The Father of Them All, by Ernest Boyd. The American Mercury, VI, (Dec., 1925) 451-8.
2. Stephen Crane, by Carl Van Doren.
3. Slump in Poetry. Critic, XLVI, (Mar., 1905) 263-77.
4. State of Pseudo-Poetry at the Present Time, by J. A. Macy. Bookman, XXVII, (July, 1908) 513-17.
5. Present American Poetry, by B. Hooker. Forum, XLII, (Aug., 1909) 148-56.
6. Recent Volumes of Verse, By B. Hooker. Bookman, XXX, (Jan., 1910) 465-70.
7. Younger Choir, by R. Le Gallienne. Forum, XLIII, (June, 1910) 651-60.
8. Reign of the Elemental. Nation, XCI, (Oct. 6, 1910) 307-8.
9. What is Our New Poetry to Be? Review of Reviews, XLIII, (June, 1911) 728-9.
10. Present State of Poetry, by A. D. Ficke. North American, CXCV, (Sept., 1911) 429-41.
11. Interest in Poetry. Nation, XCIV, (Feb. 15, 1912) 154.
12. Muse in Exile, by W. Watson. Century, LXXXIII, (April, 1912) 944-8.
13. Books of the Coming Year. Dial, LIII, (Sept. 16, 1912) 179-81.
14. Poetry of Modern America. Review of Reviews, XLVI, (Dec., 1912) 745-46.
15. Poetry of the Year. Literary Digest, XLV, (Dec. 28, 1912) 1226.
16. Note on Contemporary Poetry, by H. Hagedorn. North American, CXCVI, (Dec., 1912) 772-9.

17. Lyric Year, by C. Vale. Forum, XLIX, (Jan., 1913) 91-106.
18. Lyric Year, Edited by F. Earle (review). North American, CXC VII (Feb., 1913) 283-4.
19. Lyres and Laureates, by W. A. Bradley. Bookman, XXXVII, (April, 1913) 191-9.
20. New Poetry, by R. M. Alden. Nation, XCVI, (April 17, 1913) 386-7.
21. Mr. Ezra Pound and "Poetry," by W. Rice. Dial, LIV, (May 16, 1913) 409.
22. In Defense of "Poetry", by H. Monroe. Dial, LIV, (May 16, 1913) 409.
23. Town and the Country Muse. Nation, XCVII, (Dec. 11, 1913) 558-9.
24. New Lamps for Old. Dial, LVI, (March 16, 1914) 231-3.
25. Old and New Poetry, by E. Wyatt. Dial, LVI, (May 1, 1914) 375-6.
26. Voices of the Living Poets. Current Opinion, LVI, 382-3 (May, 1914)
27. New Poetry, by W. A. Bradley. Bookman, XL, (Oct. 1914) 202-10.
28. Renaissance, by E. Pound. Poetry, V, (Feb., 1915) 227-33. V, (Mar., 1915) 283-7, VI, (May, 1915) 84-91.
29. New Naivete, by L. W. Smith. Atlantic Monthly, CXVII, (April, 1916) 487-92.
30. Prosperous Poet, by J. Kilmer. Bookman, XLIII, (April, 1916) 181-2.
31. Modern Tendency in Poetry, by A. D. Ficke. North American, CCIV, (Sept., 1916) 438-47.
32. The New Poetry. Review of Reviews, LIV, (Aug., 1916) 233.

33. Poetry and Other Things, by H. E. Warner. Dial, LXI, (Aug. 15, 1916) 91-4.
34. American Verse Recently Published, by O. W. Firkins. Nation, CIII, (Aug. 17, 1916) 151-2.
35. Year's Poetry. Literary Digest, LIII, (Nov. 18, 1916) 1329-30.
36. Four American Poets, by W. A. Bradley. Dial, LXI, (Dec. 14, 1916) 523-30. Jan., 1917) 103-17.
37. Consideration of Modern Poetry, by A. Lowell. North American, CCV, (Jan., 1917) 103-17.
38. Year in Poetry, by W. S. Braithwaite. Bookman, XLV, (May, June, 1917) 278-82, 429-40.
39. Confectionery and Caviar, by C. Aiken. Dial, LXIII, (Nov. 22, 1917) 513-15.
40. Contemporary Poetry, by J. E. Rittenhouse. Bookman, XLVI, (Jan., Feb., 1918) 575-9, 678-83, XLVII, (April, 1918) 199-207.
41. War and the Artist, by H. Monroe. Poetry, XI, (Mar., 1918) 320-2.
42. Praise for American Poets. Literary Digest, LIX, (Nov. 30, 1918) 26-7.